



LIL LORIMER



BY THEO GIFT







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LIL LORIMER.



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LIL LORIMER.

A Novel.

By THEO GIFT,

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"PRETTY MISS BELLEW," "MAID ELLICE," "A MATTER OF FACT GIRL,"
"VISITED ON THE CHILDREN," &c.

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VOLUME I.

LIL LORIMER.

CHAPTER I.

A SULTRY CITY.

“From o’er the roofs
And from the shaded patios cool there spreads
The breath of flowers and aromatic leaves.”

George Eliot, ‘Spanish Gipsy.’

“Now ladies loiter in baths, and people make presents of flowers, and wine is put in ice. Now doors and brick-walls are burning to the hand.”—*Leigh Hunt.*

“WOULDN’T it be nicer if we had no natives at all? I should so like it just for once.”

“Why, Lil, what an idea! There would be so few girls.”

“But we only want a few, don’t we? And as for the men——”

“Oh, bother *men*! Goodness knows there are always enough of them!” This, spoken with exceeding scorn, and by an exceedingly scornful-looking young lady, pretty perhaps, but with only the slim, unformed prettiness of sixteen,

and habited in nothing more dainty or *recherché* than that straight linen garment, white of hue and scant of material, by Chaucer "hight" a "smock." The other two speakers, girls also, but older (for Lil was nineteen, and Lisbeth quite a middle-aged person who had already lived all but a quarter of a century), were arrayed after the same simple fashion as their younger sister; but while she presented a somewhat eccentric appearance, having taken up a sitting position on the floor, with her chin resting on her knees, her long, thin arms loosely embracing them, and her long, light hair falling round her in a cloud, so that she looked not at all unlike some uncanny elf, the other two reclined on two little white beds at opposite sides of the large, dimly-lit room—Lil with her pretty bare feet pressed against the scrolled iron foot of the bed for coolness, and all her fair hair drawn off from the delicate face and throat, and coiled up on the top of her head in a wavy, glittering mass; while Liz, more mindful of the risk of tangling her nut-brown tresses, had woven them into two long plaits, spread out on either side of her face over the white pillow, which looked so cool and felt so hot to the flushed cheek pressed down on it, and lay fanning herself languidly with a huge red fan made of flamingo feathers.

It was *very* hot! Midday had struck some time since upon the clock in the "comedor", or dining-room; and as all the

rooms opened one into another throughout the house, and all the doors were open to make as much draught as was practicable, the twelve strokes were distinctly audible in the room where the girls had retired for their noonday "siesta"; and where, save for the subdued chatter of their Anglo-Saxon tongues, the most absolute stillness reigned.

Don't talk to me of the silence of a tropical forest; of the ice regions at the North Pole; or even of the great Desert of Sahara. Monkeys and parrots jabber and shriek in the densest forest; and you can ask any whaler you like (if you happen to know such gentry, that is) about the ceaseless boom and roar of the waves on those frost-bound coasts, and what sort of noise the huge ice-floes make in rending and tearing asunder before a thaw. Even in the desert there are hyænas to laugh, and lions to roar; but in a South American city at summer noontide, there are none of these. Spaniards, and South Americans generally, go to sleep; or, if they don't sleep, sit in darkened rooms, consuming cigarettes and "maté", and contemplating serenely that wise axiom of theirs—"Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the sun."

In the Hardys' house it was particularly still. Not a sound came from the kitchen regions, where the servants were probably asleep too; and if Mr. Hardy was awake and busy down in his office on the ground-floor, it is likely that his two clerks

were not. Mr. Hardy was generally awake, and generally busy ; but as he never made a noise at any time, and was indeed rarely heard to speak at all, he could hardly be considered as a disturbing element in any household.

And it was so hot ! Lil had shut the outer door of the room, which in these houses serves for window as well, and had fastened the shutters ; but through a tiny crack in the latter one ray of burning orange light forced its way in, and fell athwart the floor like a fiery finger, seeming to scorch the boards on which it lay. But excluding the hot air without was only another word for excluding any air at all ; and the faint, jarring hum of millions on millions of flies hovering in the glare outside, seemed to drum upon the ear like a fevered pulse, and intensify the heat which it suggested.

Lisbeth let the fan fall at her side, as if even the slight exertion of holding it was too much for her, and laughed.

“Louie is *so*—old !” she said with listless irony. “I wonder what she would do if she ever went to a country where men weren’t so plentiful as here : where there were quite as many women—or more !”

“*Go away*,” retorted the elf promptly. “And so would Lil. She wouldn’t stay under such circumstances, I know.”

“Well, no, I should have too much consideration for—

the other women!" said Lil gravely; then throwing back her beautiful arms behind her head, so as to raise it upon them, she added: "But don't talk nonsense, Loo. Think of a few people we could have, so as to make a really nice little evening; and be quick, or Liz will be asleep. She's half off now. There are the Consulate girls, of course."

"Two," said Louie, checking them off on her fingers. "And the papa and mamma?"

"Oh yes, to impart proper dignity, which Mr. Beauchamp always does. What a thing it is to wear a large white tie at all times and seasons."

"But Mr. Spate wears a white tie too, and he's not dignified."

"Oh, *Mr. Spate*! He's the chaplain: that's quite different. Go on, Loo, and don't say the McGregors, as I see you are meditating."

"Why not? The doctor is always so jolly."

"Yes, but as sure as we ask him, he'll trot all over the town, saying to everybody, 'Are you going to this party at the Hardys?—*we* are!' and then every one who isn't, will be dreadfully offended, and will take to scowling at us for the next six months."

"And it will be no use explaining that it wasn't a party, but only two or three friends who dropped in," said Liz,

sleepily, "because we are always explaining, and always being scowled at the more. There are the Heals——"

"And their dreadful father and mother! Mrs. Heal without an 'H' in her vocabulary, and her husband, who calls you 'Miss Liz,' and paws you all the time he is talking to you—oh, Liz, they're too vulgar. I'm sure neither Captain Carnegie nor—nor his friend, would ever want to come to us again if they met them here."

"My dear Lil, you're too fastidious. If the Heals are common they ought to make Carnegie and his friend appreciate our uncommonness all the more. Besides, if we are to have no natives—— But you forgot the Sanchez girls when you said that. They must come on account of Pedro."

"Why?"

"It wouldn't do to ask him again without them."

"Of course not; but is it absolutely necessary to ask him at all? He is here often enough as it is."

"Lil, Lil! who does he come to see?"

"Me, I suppose," said Lil with perfect composure, "but that is no reason he should stand beside me all the time, and glare at me whenever I dare to speak to any one else, as if—as if I belonged to him. I saw Mr. Melville open his eyes once when——"

A peal of laughter from the Elf interrupted her.

"Oh Lil! Lil! Lil! Now the secret's out! We must give a party in honour of this new flag-lieutenant, Mr. Melville, and we mustn't ask the Heals lest their vulgarity should grate on his gentility; nor any natives, because he can't speak Spanish; not even poor Pedro—Lil's own devoted Pedrito!—lest in asserting his rights he should provoke a 'stony British stare' from the new hero. Why, Lil, who would think *you* could be so smitten with a man the first time you saw him!"

Lil's fair, delicate face flushed crimson.

"I wish you would not talk so foolishly," she said angrily. "I can't bear to hear you, and it's such—such bad form. Isn't it, Liz? I wish you would speak to her."

But Liz was past speaking, being sound asleep; and Louie never would submit to be put down by her second sister without an argument.

"What is bad form? Talking of people being smitten?" she asked. "But every one does so; it isn't even slang, and Captain Carnegie said that you——"

"Captain Carnegie couldn't say I ever was smitten with him," Lil broke in, still angrily.

"No, it was Liz *he* used to flirt with," the Elf answered

quite calmly and reasonably, "but that was three years ago; and as for you and Pedro——"

"I and Pedro! Why do you speak of us together that way? What has he to do with me? Louie, you are very unkind and impertinent," cried the elder sister, her eyes full of tears. Her young sister stood up and looked at her in amazement.

"Why, Lil, isn't he always bringing you flowers and opera tickets, and that beautiful horse of his to ride? And you *take* them, you——. But there, I didn't mean to vex you, or make you cry. I had better go and take my 'siesta'; and as to Thursday, of course you'll ask whom you like. *Dios sabe*, you always get your own way in the end."

With which parting shot, and a good-tempered nod from her precocious little blonde head, Louie disappeared into the adjoining room, and lost no time in following her eldest sister's example.

Lil threw herself back on her pillows with a passionate half sob. *Was* she sure to get her own way in the end, she asked herself? She thought not. It seemed to her as if she never could get her own way, her best way, that is, on account of all the other people who stood between her and it: the people who did not know what that way was, and would have laughed at her if they did.

Why should the memory of a stranger's eyes—brown eyes

with a sort of brave, pure honesty in them—bring it before her so sharply to-day, and make her feel how far away she was from it till she grew disgusted with herself and every one else? Had she grown fanciful all of a sudden; or was it only as Louie, with her mocking, child-shrewdness, suggested? Was she—smitten?

Either Lil's face was burning, or the pillow. She turned the latter angrily, and laid her cheek against the cooler side; but the hot flush was not to be got rid of in that way, and after a little while she sat up, letting her small, naked feet slide on to the floor, and looking, in her clinging white drapery and with the ruffled fair hair knotted loosely on her head, like a study for one of Bougerau's nymphs.

Lisbeth still slept soundly, her more regular features flushed with slumber, the little brown curls on her forehead damp and limp with heat. Just over her head a huge centipede, a couple of inches long, was slowly trailing its hairy length over the whitewashed wall. There was no drapery to the beds, and no carpet on the floor, which had been washed down with a pail of water only that morning; and from under the crack of the outer door a little stream of minute black ants had filed in, and were marching in full military order across the snowy boards. To English eyes it would have looked a very bare and prison-like apartment for two

such pretty girls to call their own ; but carpets, curtains and such luxuries suggest warmth and favour insects ; and Lil herself was far from regretting them as, only pausing to whisk the centipede from his position, and extinguish him under a slipper, she glided, still barefoot, from the room, and closed the door behind her.

The adjoining apartment was even more destitute of furniture, the only articles in it being a large deal table covered with an ironing blanket, a three-legged iron pot yclept a "brazero", and still containing the ashes of what had been a charcoal fire, a bath half full of cold water, and a heap of towels. Lil went up to the table and stood contemplating three daintily frilled and furbelowed muslin gowns which were spread out upon it.

"Who would think I had starched and ironed two of those before seven o'clock this morning?" she said to herself, glancing down at her pretty hands, which in their almost waxen fairness certainly bore no evidence of such toil. "And they do look nice ! Only one singe, and that on my own, which doesn't so much matter. We can put them on to-day to go to the Beauchamps. I wonder if he will be there, by the way. Perhaps he hasn't got leave to-day ; and what does it matter if he has, or not—to me ? Why, the very last time I wore this dress I remember telling Pedro Sanchez

that I never liked it without some dark red roses to set it off, and he brought me some the same evening. I knew he would. I had *meant* him to do so. Louie was quite right, and, oh dear! what a miserable hypocrite I am to scold her! I—I wish that other man had gone to any other place than here. Perhaps if I never saw any one worth speaking to I might grow more content with those about me: might even drift into doing as they predict, and marry—— Oh! no, no, though, it could never come to *that*!”

Still in a mood of impatient self-disgust the girl took her bath and dressed, and then a little cooled and refreshed, drew back the fastenings of the outer door and peeped out. It opened, as did all the others, on to an unroofed wooden gallery, protected by a railing in heavy, scrolled iron-work, and which ran round three sides of the interior of the building overhanging a “patio” (or court), paved in squares of rough black and white marble. There was a fig-tree growing in the centre of the “patio”, its heavy branches laden with ripe purple fruit rising up above the top of the balustrade; and as Lil stepped out on to the gallery, and shading her eyes, gazed out through the broad network of pale, translucent green, the great rough leaves and thick juicy stems, showed as though cut out in emerald glass against the blue, intolerable glare beyond. Here, where Lil stood, she was in shadow,

but on either side the yellowish, stuccoed walls of the house glowed like beaten gold in the fervid sunbeams, while the wooden flooring of the balcony was so hot as almost to scorch her feet ; and what little paint was not already blistered off the outsides of the bedroom doors, looked swollen up and ready to peel away at a touch. Not far off a couple of snow-white pigeons were scratching among the dried peas set out in a shallow bowl of coarse red earthenware for their benefit ; and in one corner of the gallery a big tree heliotrope was growing in a wooden box, its dusky purple blossoms hanging in rich clusters from the roughly painted yellow wall against which they were trained : their heavy, luscious scent mingling with the pungent odour of the fig-leaves, and loading the air with fragrance. Not a breath of wind fanned the girl's pale, delicate cheek. Not a cloud relieved the dazzling glare of that mighty, glowing vault of blue above. It was all heat, silent, throbbing, breathless heat, above, below, and around ; but gradually as she stood there the sounds of re-awakened life began to be heard again in the scorched and sleepy world outside. From the rear of the house came a clatter of pots and pans, and the sound of a rough, jocund voice, singing that favourite negro ditty, " *Me gustan todas,*" sure evidence that old Juana, the black cook, had finished her " *siesta*", and was hard at work again ; while from the open street-door

leading into the patio below she could hear the tramp of feet passing and repassing along the pavement without ; then a man crying, "Naranjas y Sandios !" (oranges and water-melons), and the sudden jingle of the milk-cans, as the mule carrying them on his afternoon round stopped before the door. Lil's spirits rose with the prospect of a cup of tea, that best of refreshments in hot weather or cold.

"After all," she began to say to herself with a half-mutinous, half-saucy smile on her sweet, curved lips, "I never have encouraged Pedro. If he gives me flowers and rides, so do other people, and I could not refuse them, from him in particular, without rudeness. It is the custom of the country, and it isn't my fault if he will not be like other men who make their attentions more valuable by pressing them less hotly. People may say what they like, but I do not know another girl here who would repulse him—at any rate before he offered himself to her—no, not one. And why should I set myself up to be different from the rest?"

"Lil," cried the Elf, opening her own door just wide enough to show her small white face adorned now with an elaborately fluffy fringe, "do you know that the thermometer is still at 98° in the shade, and that it's awfully wicked of

you to be standing out there ! Do come in. Liz wants you to do her hair for her before we have some tea ; and the milk has come, so Juana says she will get it ready for us as soon as we like. Carramba ! how hot it will be for our walk this afternoon ! I hope we shall meet some one nice to reward us, don't you ? ”

CHAPTER II.

THE HARDY GIRLS.

“Ye breathe but accusation vast and vague,
Spleen-born, I think, and proofless. If ye know,
Set up the charge ye know, to stand or face !”

Tennyson, ‘Princess.’

“PRINCE HENRY—Nay let us mount the church steps here,
Under the doorway’s sacred shadow ;
We can see all things and be freer
From the crowd that madly heaves and presses.

ELSIE—What a gay pageant ! What bright dresses !”

‘The Golden Legend.’

IT was a good bit later on the same day, when the two younger Hardy girls, having paid their visit at the English Consulate, and secured the presence of the Beauchamp family for their party, were coming slowly homewards through the Plaza round which, as in most Spanish countries, the town had originally been built. It was flanked on one side by the “Cabildo”, a massive grey stone building, comprising under one roof a Palace of Justice, Parliament House, and prison, and grim and gloomy enough to correspond to at least two of these titles ; and on the other by the Cathedral, with its huge portico and broad flights of dazzling marble steps leading to a vast, dusky interior, whose shadowy

depths, relieved here and there by the twinkling lamp hanging before some side altar, the gaudy robe of a Madonna, rose-coloured and blue, and pinned over with little gold and silver hearts, or the glittering fretwork of a gilded shrine, had something unspeakably cool, refreshing, and old-world about it, when contrasted with the glare and bustle without.

Lil was very fond of slipping into the Cathedral whenever she could. The solemn stillness, the terrible realism of those painted Christs appealing with the dumb piteousness of tear-glazed eyes, and wounded hands and feet, from the crosses to which they were nailed, the veiled, kneeling figures scattered here and there over the marble pavement, the faint smell of incense ever lingering in the atmosphere, quieted her restless impatient spirit, with its warm, undisciplined impulses and vague yearnings after what it knew not. Sometimes she knelt too, and poured out a passionate prayer in no orthodox words; nor indeed for any orthodox end, save the scarcely defined one that all things generally, herself included, could be made different from what they were. Sometimes she only sat quietly on an altar-step, gazing and drinking in the peace and stillness of the surroundings; or repeating to herself some bit of poetry—Tennyson's "St Agnes", or Mrs. Browning's "Sleep"—as though the utterance of the grand words gave some relief to her overcharged soul.

Pepita Sanchez, Pedro's elder sister, who was "dévota", and had seen her there once or twice, took quite a fancy to her in consequence, and favoured her brother's suit with the girl; declaring that, though the Hardys generally might be as hopeless "hereticos" as most English, "la Lilita" was, she felt sure, "una buena Catolica y muy religiosa"¹ at heart: while, on the other hand, Mr. Spate, who had heard of the practice, took on himself to rebuke the girl for it; telling her quite seriously that by frequenting that stronghold of idolatry she was actually encouraging Popery in its vilest form, and casting discredit on the pure, reformed religion to which she belonged. But Lil only laughed, and said she hadn't enough religion in herself to either encourage or discredit it in any one else; and that she would gladly go and sit in the English chapel instead, if it were not kept tightly locked up from week's end to week's end, Sundays excepted; and if the glaring ugliness of its white-washed walls, and of the lion and unicorn over the Communion-table did not make her head ache on the one day when she was compelled to spend a couple of hours in contemplating them. And indeed I am afraid Lil was right, and her commentators—both of them—wrong. She was not religious. She might have been if she had known how; but she did not.

¹ *a good Catholic and very religious.*

To-day, having only Louie with her, for Lisbeth had elected to stay at home on the chance of callers, she had gone into the Cathedral as usual, for a few minutes' rest and coolness : the Elf, meanwhile, remaining in the portico outside, whence she had a good view of the gay world in general. Below her was the Plaza, square in shape, bathed in a very flood of golden sunshine, its four intersecting paths shaded by double rows of acacia and "paraiso" trees ; the latter of which only a few months back had filled the whole air with the sweetness of their clustered lilac blossoms, and which were now in their fullest midsummer luxuriance of emerald leaf and twig. Beneath these trees little iron and marble benches were liberally scattered ; and all about, on the paths and over the gravel, circulated crowds of gaily-dressed people—swarthy mulattos ; Basque women with heads tied up in bright-coloured handkerchiefs, and sharp, neatly-cut features ; officers of the "Guarda Nacional" in blue and scarlet and gold ; miniature Spanish dandies in glossy chimney-pot hats, glossier broad cloth, and gloves of immaculate fit ; English sheep-farmers from the interior, huge sandy-haired giants, in crushed felt hats and clothes of no fit at all ; blonde Germans ; negroes black as ink ; priests in big shovel hats and flapping cloaks ; and elegant Spanish doñas, flirting the inevitable fan, their bright eyes glancing from side to side from under their lace

mantillas as they trailed behind them silks delicate enough in colour and costly in texture to be only worn at a ball in less favoured climes—all turning out for their evening “paseo”, or seated about on the benches listening to the strains of a French man-of-war band, which was playing in one corner.

As Lil came out, her sister caught her by the arm, and pointed to a bench at some distance.

“Look!” she said eagerly. “Do you see those two men there, one in grey, with a white sun helmet, and the other in naval uniform? I’ve been watching them some time. They are Captain Carnegie and the new man, Mr. Melville, but I don’t think they have looked this way. Let us walk towards them, Lil, and then they will see us, and come to meet us.”

But perhaps the influence of that dim, grave interior was still on Lil, for she flushed up and turned her head away from, instead of towards, the persons indicated.

“And why should we go out of our own way to make them do the same, Louie? I wish you wouldn’t point at people,” she said reprovingly, as she drew her sister’s arm through hers, and ran down the steps without even glancing in the direction where Louie’s gaze was turned. “I am going quite the other way—to Belmoni’s ‘confiteria’. We shall want some sponge-cakes on Thursday.”

“But this is only Monday. Good gracious, Lil, we don’t

want to order them now!" cried the Elf in her own quick way; then, with a sudden burst of frank laughter, "Oh, yes, we do. I see—I *didn't* see before—that that is Pedro's carriage just outside the 'confiteria', and Pedro himself stepping out of it. Well, we shall have an escort home at any rate. And oh! Lil, you pretended only this morning not to like him! You had forgotten that lovely carriage, I suppose?"

"No, I had not forgotten it, and I don't like him, or you either, when you talk in that way. I—Louie, pray don't look at him; don't let him think we've seen him. I will *not* have him always at my side," Lil cried in quick, passionate undertones, as still holding her sister's arm, she turned sharply round, and walked back again as swiftly as she had come.

Not so swiftly, however, but that the young Spaniard, just descending from his elegant barouche, had seen the movement; and the sight brought so black a scowl over the almost feminine beauty of his face as scarcely needed the muttered words, "*Carajo! Que diablo*—But no, it is impossible — *impossible* she could have meant it,"—to intensify its scornful ferocity.

As he spoke, however, he sprang back again into his carriage; and from that more elevated seat saw the two English officers as they rose slowly from their bench and,

throwing away their cigars, came forward as if in recognition of the girls who had avoided him !

But Loo had been wrong in her previous conjecture ; for the recognition had come some minutes earlier, while Lil was still in the Cathedral, and when Frank Melville, breaking a silence of some minutes, during which the two friends had sat smoking and watching the motley throng around them with that happy enjoyment of life, and ignoring of heat, dust, and all minor discomforts so characteristic of sailors, said quietly, and with a gesture of his cigar towards the Cathedral :

“Carnegie, your eyes are better than mine. Surely that little figure up there in the porch yonder is English?”

Captain Carnegie had to clear the eyes referred to before replying : a very gorgeous lady in rose-coloured satin, with a white lace mantilla over her piled-up hair, and leading a little shivering dog of a peculiar hairless breed, much affected by South American ladies in lieu of hot-water bottles on winter nights, having just swept by him : her train, which was at least a yard long, raising quite a whirlwind of choking yellow dust, and nearly blinding the gallant officer.

“That?” he said as soon as he could see. “Oh ! yes, she’s English, as I suppose you guessed by the big Gainsborough hat. What’s more, she’s little Loo Hardy, who, I don’t doubt, has planted herself there so as to see and be seen more

easily. She's looking at us now; and I expect by that backward glance that one of her sisters is inside, so if you want to escape now's your time, Frank. A moment later it'll be little Loo's; and, for all the indifferent way in which she's affecting to flirt that big white fan, and contemplate vacancy, I'll lay five bob to two she spotted you before you spotted her."

Mr. Melville looked rather surprised: his eyes—pleasant, soft, hazel eyes—travelling slowly from his friend's keen, satirical face, to the young girl in question. He was a tall, bright-looking young fellow about eight-and-twenty, clean shaven, and with a very fair, boyish face; yet he had won the V.C. three years before, when with the naval brigade in Abyssinia; and had been promoted over the heads of several men to the post he occupied at present. He had just joined the Admiral's ship on the east coast station as flag-lieutenant, and was an old chum and schoolfellow of Carnegie's.

"Who do you mean?" he asked gravely. "Surely not the youngest of those three very pretty girls you introduced me to on Sunday; and who have asked us to look in one evening this week?"

"Precisely. Thursday the evening is; and mind you go in thin shoes and otherwise prepared for a hop."

"But there's not to be anything of the kind, is there? Miss Hardy only asked me to call on that evening so that I might make her father's acquaintance."

"Yes, but you could have done that without asking. You've only to be introduced at a house here, and you can call every evening of the week if you like. It's one of the *modas del país* in these parts; but if you're asked for a special evening a couple of days hence, and more especially if the lady of the house murmurs something about 'a little music,' as I heard Liz Hardy doing, that means dancing, and twenty people or more to meet you."

"Well, it's a very pleasant *moda de*—thingum-y-jig!" said the younger man cheerfully, "especially if all the English houses here are as agreeable as that one. By the way, Carnegie, I suppose you've known the young ladies some time, as you seem so intimate with them?"

"*Known* them! I should think I did, after a three years' station here! Why, lad, there isn't a blue jacket, or for that matter, a black coat either, in the place that doesn't know Liz, Lil, and Loo, the three Hardy girls."

"Who are they?" asked the other a little soberly, perhaps because the band was just then playing one of the saddest and prettiest airs from "la Traviata"; perhaps because, being a man with much honest, healthy reverence

for womankind, something in his friend's tone grated on him.

“ ‘ Who are they ? ’ Ah ! that’s just what every one asks, and what I can’t exactly tell you. They’re a cut above—several cuts above, if you like—most of the English who come out here ; but they’re not particularly well off, and what old Hardy is precisely no one seems to know. He has an office, and he’s supposed to manage some water-works on the other side of the bay ; but his real occupation is supposed to be more of a quasi-diplomatic nature, connected with the Government here. I’ve heard him put down as an agent of Rothschild’s, but *quien sabe*, as the natives say, he may be anything. He’s a little, thin-lipped man with a white head, who never speaks, and always wears a big Panama hat, and a suit of immaculate white linen ; and you may meet him now and then coming out of the different Consulates, or at one of those *cafés* where the Government officials go to play billiards and talk politics ; but I’ve never seen him yet at any social gathering, and deuced rarely in his own house. As for his girls—— Well, he lets them grow up and manage for themselves as they can, or please.”

“ Have they no mother ? ”

“ No, she died when Loo was a baby ; but I’ve heard it said she was not only a beauty—which one might expect,

looking at the girls—but a good woman and a refined and cultivated lady. Even the people who most dislike old Hardy for his mysterious ways and ungenial manners, and have most stories to tell of the girls and their flirtations, never say an ill word against the mother.”

“Poor girls!” said the young officer, pityingly, “they must have had rather a sad, lonely life of it. I dare say it has drawn them together, though. They seemed very united.”

“Oh yes, that’s their best point. They haven’t got many feminine pettinesses: never quarrel or nag at one another, or that sort of thing; but don’t go pitying them, for they don’t need it. I doubt if they’ve ever done a thing in their lives but race about, laugh, dance, sing, and carry on with one man or another from the time that they were too big to be carried in arms themselves; and as to sadness—well, I don’t believe one of them, unless it be Lil, knows the meaning of the word. Fast little thing as she is, she does get fits of the blues occasionally, and shows them by turning savage and snapping, not at her own family, but at any unlucky man who happens to come within reach of her.”

“*Lil?*” the other spoke quickly; “that is the second, isn’t it? The tall one with a bonnie fair face like a lily, and a quantity of pale gold hair? Why, Carnegie, old man, what has soured you to the extent of talking of that pretty,

graceful, douce-speaking lassie in connection with such words as 'fast' or 'savage' ! Has she offended you ? ”

Captain Carnegie burst out laughing.

“ Offended me ! *Lil Hardy* ? Not likely ! Why, we are the best of friends ; so much so that I really don't think she would even try to get up a flirtation with me. Perhaps she knows it wouldn't be much good, seeing that I've gone through all that with the fair Liz and——survived it ! No, upon my word, I almost think Lil is the best of the bunch. She's not quite such a flippant little buccaneer as Miss Loo there ; and she has a trifle more heart than Liz : almost enough perhaps to make her flirtations rather dangerous to herself as well as to the male victims of them. So 'ware hawk', Frank ! You're a good-looking fellow, you know, and it would be my fault if you were to fall into the toils, seeing that I introduced you there.”

“ Thank you ; but there isn't the least fear for me ; and in any case there would be no fault in a man's admiring three such bright, frank, winsome girls as those we are speaking of. The wonder to me is that the two elder ones haven't got snapped up long before now.”

“ Humph ! perhaps it is to them too, poor things ; but God disposes, and man——seldom——proposes, in some cases ! ”

“ Look here, Carnegie, I hate that vague way of talking

about women. If there's anything to say against them, better say it out at once, or let it alone. Do you mean they are—disreputable?"

"My dear fellow, not in the least! Whoever suggested such a thing? The Hardy girls are no worse than heaps of others in the best society; but you know the old saying,

‘When woman runs after then man runs away,
And the man can run faster, whatever you say.’

And the simple fact is, they do their running too openly: the consequence of which is, there isn't an eligible man in the place (counter-jumpers they hold their heads too high for) that hasn't been 'talked about' in connection with one or other of them. In London or any other place, I do believe they would have come to grief long ago."

"And what has prevented it here, then?"

"Well, I don't exactly know, unless it is their very unprotectedness, and the absolute freedom which all girls seem to enjoy in these parts, and which puts men on their honour, as it were, with regard to them. Poor Liz did come to trouble, however, over a love affair of hers, and got brutally jilted by a man she had gone more than a few lengths to secure. It was just after I came out, and I was awfully smitten with her. Indeed I shouldn't mind giving the

scamp a kicking now, though it's not from *me* he deserves it; for she just led me on and played me off against him in the coolest way, when she wanted to bring him to the point; and then dropped me like a worn-out glove as soon as I had served her purpose. I was awfully mad at the time; but since then I've had so many successors that, as you see, my wrongs have smoothed themselves down. No, no, Frank, my boy, there's no *harm* in admiring one pretty girl or three; but you're not such a hard-headed cuss as I am: you never were in the old Rugby days; and then you know how awfully particular your people at home are. Keep clear of an entanglement, whatever you do. You mightn't get out of it so easily; and if it were with Lil——"

"There she is!" Mr. Melville interrupted, his eyes still on the Cathedral.

"Ah! and Loo is pointing us out to her. Now they'll be down on us, and we shall have to walk home with them. Confound it! I had only just begun this cigar."

"Don't distress yourself. They are not troubling their heads in the least about us. They are going off quite another way," Frank Melville said with something like triumph in his voice; but almost as he spoke the two girls stopped, wheeled round, and came directly towards them. Captain Carnegie rose from his seat laughing a little. "Ah," he

said, "when you've been here a few months longer, young man, you won't answer quite so glibly for which 'way' the Hardy girls are going. I'm sadly afraid you are the attraction now; but never mind, *I'll* take care of you. Come and do the polite."

CHAPTER III.

A FACE IN THE STREET.

“This to hear would Desdemona seriously incline,
But still the house affairs would draw her thence :
Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
She’d come again, and with a greedy ear
Devour.” *Othello.*

“Oh, Buckingham, take heed of yonder dog !
. . . . he bites, and when he bites
His venom tooth will rankle to the death.”
Richard III.

THURSDAY evening at the Hardys’ was a success, as indeed the social evenings at that house generally were : its young mistresses sparing no efforts of their own to make them so, and likewise to prevent those said efforts from becoming apparent to their father in the forms of anything approaching to fuss or domestic confusion, the two things which they knew to be obnoxious enough to him to have called down a prohibition of the whole affair.

Only on the morning of the day in question Liz said to him as he was finishing the cup of coffee and slice of dry toast which formed his frugal breakfast :

“The Beauchamps have promised to come in this evening, father. Can you stay at home?”

Mr. Hardy turned his head slowly so as to look at her out of the corner of his small, half-closed, cold, blue eyes.

“Is the Consul himself coming?” he asked.

“Yes—Lil was calling there—and he said he would.”

“Then I suppose you have asked some other people too?”

“Yes, we thought it would be pleasant, but only three or four: the——”

“You may spare me the list. I will look in.”

He rose as he spoke, settling his chin into the high shirt-collar and trim white cravat which always added so much to the old-fashioned decorum of Mr. Hardy's appearance, and taking the large white sunshade which Liz handed to him, nodded slightly to the two younger girls and went out. They looked up and said, “Adios, papa,” but without rising or kissing him;—demonstrations which they had learnt from early childhood to be unacceptable, and then sat silently till the last sound of his footsteps had died away from the long gallery and down the flight of marble steps leading to the street. The instant they had done so Loo sprang up and turned a pirouette in the centre of the floor.

“*Gracias à Dios!*” cried the irreverent girl. “Do you know I thought breakfast was *never* coming to an end! Liz,

give me a dollar, and let me be off to the market before it gets any hotter. I told Juana I'd choose the fruit myself. We must have some grapes and bananas and——"

"I hope you are not thinking of spending a dollar on a few grapes and bananas," said Liz severely, and drawing a very dirty piece of paper-money from her purse as she spoke. "Here it is, but you must get the cakes with it as well, and mind we shall want a good lot. You'll make the tipsy-cake, Lil?"

"Of course," said Lil serenely, "but there's plenty of time for that after lunch. I'm going to wash out the antimacassars now. They're not as fresh as they should be; and I meant to have done them yesterday, only I got so absorbed in that number of the 'Contemporary' Captain Maitland brought, I couldn't put it down. Liz, how delightful those papers of Sir John Lubbock's are on——"

"Ah!"—Liz was not fond of reading, and her mind was on the antimacassars—"I don't think the big one will bear washing any more," she said thoughtfully. "There were three holes in it when I did it up last time. Work materials cost so much, or Louie said she would crochet a new one if I got her the thread. *Ay àe mi*, Lil!—I wish we had relations in England to send us out those sorts of things, as the Beauchamps' relations do."

“I often wish we had relations *anywhere*,” said Lil lightly, “but we can’t go with dirty antimacassars till we find them. Never mind, Liz, if I wash them into holes I’ll darn them again,” and she flew off laughing. It was one of Lil’s sunshiny days, which indeed came much oftener than her cloudy ones; and on this occasion there seemed a special well-spring of brightness within her, moving her to set about the business of the day, with as much energy as though heat and flies were nothing, and they were expecting fifty guests, instead of “three or four.”

Yet after all there were more than Lisbeth had computed; and Captain Carnegie felt himself to have been as right as he usually was, when, on entering the room with his friend, Frank Melville, they found sixteen or eighteen other people there before them: of whom two-thirds were men, and (with the exception of the English Consul and a couple of bronzed and bearded “Estancieros”¹) men wearing the same uniform as himself.

The room was large, and papered and carpeted in English fashion, with plenty of low wicker-chairs and gipsy-tables scattered about it, a few rather nice water-colour drawings on the walls; and a profusion of flowers everywhere. There were three large windows opening on to a long balcony

¹ Sheep-farmers.

which overhung the street ; and from which you could look out over a jumble of lower houses standing up white and black in the moonlight, and with here and there a tall, graceful minaret rising into the starlit sky, to where, far away on the broad bosom of the La Plata, the clustered vessels of the fleet were lying, glittering with watch-lights all along their line like fiery sparkles doubled in the blue below.

The windows were all standing open, and most of the guests were grouped about them so as to get the benefit of what sea-breeze might be abroad ; while at a table near the door, on which stood a shallow bronze bowl full of tiger-lilies and white roses, Lisbeth Hardy, looking very cool and pretty in pale blue muslin, with sprays of jasmine in her hair and bosom, was pouring out tea which one or two of the younger men were helping her to dispense.

Every one seemed very much at home, and very jolly, and there was a pleasant buzz of talk and laughter going on, but subdued, because one of the Miss Beauchamps, a tall girl with a high Roman nose and black hair, and very pronouncedly *English* in dress and conversation, was playing something of Bach's, full of grand chords and graceful minor movements, in a manner which showed at least that she had been carefully taught. Lisbeth welcomed the new-comers cordially, telling them that they were late, and throwing just so much of the

extra playfulness and intimacy natural with an old friend into her manner towards Captain Carnegie as ought, Frank felt, to have caused that gentleman severe pangs of conscience. He did not seem to feel them, however; and the young flag-lieutenant left him deep in a bantering conversation with his old love, and moved away to where Lil was sitting, a slender white figure swaying to and fro in a cane rocking-chair, with two men leaning over her laughing and talking, and another, a mere lad, a midshipman, seated on the floor, half in and half out of the window, at her feet, fanning her with a large black fan.

She seemed so surrounded that Melville hesitated to approach her; but she must have seen his desire to do so; for, as he half drew back, she rose and came to meet him with such a sweet expression in her blue eyes, and such a rush of colour, half-shy, half-pleased, to her fair, pale cheeks, that the young man felt an altogether unreasonable anger against Carnegie rising within him. Of course his friend had only said what he had in kindness to him; but it seemed such a cruel, cowardly thing to say anything against three motherless girls as young and lovely as these, their own countrywomen too, and offering them the hospitality of their home in a foreign land. Naturally it was not like an English home in all respects; nor were the Misses Hardy quite like

English girls. Even their voices and gestures, pretty and graceful as they were, had something foreign about them: but what English girls so young and utterly unchaperoned as these—for after spending about ten minutes in the room, and exchanging a few half-whispered words with the Consul in a corner, Mr. Hardy had disappeared and sought a refuge in his study—could have entertained a whole roomful of men; and held their own with such frank and easy grace? And what a brutal thing it was for rough, hard men, like himself and those others, to attempt to gauge the words and actions of these innocent, maiden creatures by their own coarser experiences and male wisdom!

He was only a young fellow, of course, and it was rather absurd to work himself into a fit of chivalrous indignation over three young women whose acquaintance he had barely made; but at least no one guessed at it: not even Lil; though to her more sensitive nature the unwonted amount of gentleness and respect in his manner towards her sisters and herself added to the strange attraction she had felt towards him from the first day Captain Carnegie brought him to call; and took something from her usual coolness, and buoyancy by making her nervous lest anything should lead him to regard them differently. Liz set him down as shy, and Loo as “much too solemn and stupid.” “He might be

Lil's taste," the "cadette" said with a saucy shrug of her shoulders; but for her part she liked some one more lively; "some one who could at least understand a joke;" and so Mr. Melville (who had understood the full meaning of the joke in question so much better than the precocious little maiden herself as to make him doubly careful not to appear to do so, and also slightly irate at its being uttered in her presence) was left to *Lil's* entertainment, and was not sorry for it. For a reason of his own—a reason quite apart from the grace and beauty which made the girl pleasant for anyone to look at—he enjoyed even sitting still and watching her; and once she detected him in the act, and turning on him, asked him:

"Mr. Melville, why do you look at me so?" with a frank directness which rather startled him. Yet he answered her as simply:

"Only because you remind me so much of some one in my own home in Scotland. Looking at you just now indeed almost took me back to the dear old place, and made me forget for the moment where I was, and how many thousand miles lay between me and it. I ought to beg your pardon for being so rude; however, I hope you will forgive me."

For an instant *Lil* was silent, and Melville wondered why

so matter-of-fact an answer should have sent the blood in such a vivid rush to her cheeks, neither could the girl herself at all understand why she should have felt such a sudden, keen pleasure in the words. Was he not a total stranger to her, and might not the person alluded to be the very last sort of woman she would care to resemble? He had not even *looked* as if there were anything complimentary in his speech, rather as if he had in truth forgotten her presence; yet she answered him very gently.

“Is it your sister I remind you of? You spoke of having a sister the other day. And if she is the only one, is she not very lonely when you are away? Tell me something about her and your home. We were so little when we left Europe—I was quite a baby indeed—and mother died so soon afterwards, that I cannot fancy to myself what life there is at all.”

“It is not in the least like yours here. I don’t know if you would care for it,” he said, and then went on to tell her quite easily and pleasantly what she asked about the old mossy Grange built on the steep, heather-clad slope of a hill, and looking straight away over the fierce, foam-whitened waves of the Atlantic to the jagged peaks and misty headlands of the Hebrides: also of the quiet, homely life his people led there; of his father who was blind, of his sister (“wee Janet,” as he called her, but who did not seem to

resemble Lil very much when described), and of his mother, who was "just one of God's saints," and like no other woman in the world.

Once he said in speaking of her, "People sometimes think her cold ; but I don't think you would ; not when you came to know her, for she's just the gentlest soul living to those she likes—girls especially ;" and again, in describing a boating excursion to the Hebrides which had been spoilt by a fine town lady's fears and affectations, "I am sure *you* would have enjoyed it ;" and at each of these utterances Lil was conscious of the same strange, quick pleasure ; and wondered whether it was only because men generally—even the men they knew and talked with most freely—so seldom spoke to them of their mothers and sisters, or of their own homes in the land they had left : rather indeed avoided the subject if one of the girls introduced it, as though they and it belonged to different and utterly opposed orders of creation.

Inside the room dancing had begun ; and the swift figures of the waltzers kept whirling past the open window, and casting flying shadows over the balcony where these two stood : Lil leaning forward, her soft bare arms resting on the parapet, her face turned a little away, and her eyes, full of a liquid, dreamy light, gazing, not at her companion, but out through the warm, silent darkness to the blue, fathomless

depths studded with a million constellations of the southern sky. Within, it was all mellow, golden lamplight, gay music and gayer voices making where they stood stiller and more shadowy by contrast; but every now and then a great blaze of summer lightning—such lightning as one only sees under the tropics—broke out upon the deep blue-blackness of sea and sky, showing each separate house-roof and tower, and even every mast and rigging of the different vessels in sharp distinctness against a background of lurid flame, flushing Lil's white dress and golden hair and the great bunch of scarlet geraniums in her breast with a passing ruddy glare; and throwing into strong relief the manly figure of the young officer leaning against the wall behind her; and the features of another man gazing fixedly up at them from the street below: features whose natural comeliness was distorted by such a passion of rage, hatred, and jealousy as made them almost fiendlike. Melville himself saw the face once in the red glare, and pointed it out half-shudderingly to his companion; but before she could look it had disappeared, swallowed up again in the after darkness "like a goblin mask," as the young man said, laughing. Lil laughed too.

"Talking of masks, do you see how full all the shops are of them now Carnival is so near?" she said. "Only a week off at present! We have been living on 'tortillas'—omelets,

I mean—and saving up the egg-shells for weeks back. It is Loo's special delight to blow and prepare them, fill them up again with water and wax the ends, you know; but we don't think much of her efforts. The eggs are apt to come unsealed again and give us a drenching before we can throw them at anybody; so Liz and I generally buy a lot for our own benefit. I hope you will come ashore and play, Mr. Melville?"

"Indeed, I shall if I can get leave," said the young man, brightly. "I have seen a Roman Carnival twice; but there they throw flour and sugar-plums, and here, Carnegie tells me, the play is chiefly with water and eggs."

"Eggs filled with water or scent. Pray do not do like a dreadful lieutenant of marines, who bought a lot of eggs *au naturel* one carnival; and hurled them recklessly at the Beauchamps, destroying their drawing-room curtains before they could get the windows closed, and turning poor Laura Beauchamp into an uncooked custard awful to behold."

"What a brute!—I beg your pardon."

"You needn't. I'm sure she would have agreed with you; but they should have taken their curtains down beforehand, and 'cleared decks' generally, as the middies say. We always do; but even Liz got hurt once. A friendly-looking 'mascarado' tempted her to come out on to the balcony by the offer of a bunch of flowers at the end of a long pole; and

when she stooped forward for it, two of his companions pelted her with eggs. Her cheek was cut open before she could defend herself."

"But surely such rough play isn't fit—safe, I mean, for ladies?"

"Oh yes, it is. After all, you know it isn't easy for men to aim well at people on the roofs and balconies above them when the latter are half drowning them in water, and the streets are so slippery they can hardly keep their footing. One gets wet, of course, but no one minds that; and sometimes a really nice '*mascarado*' will throw one lovely little bouquets, or scent-squirts, in compensation."

"I will be that 'really nice *mascarado*,'" said Frank gaily, "not that I'm going to mask; but I'll certainly pelt you with flowers if you like them; and I hope in gratitude you won't pelt me with eggs."

"Oh! but that is just what gratitude will *make* me do," the girl said quite gravely. "Don't you know that to refuse to throw at a man who is throwing at you is the greatest slight you can show him, just as to squirt him from a squirt he has tossed you is the greatest favour? The more attentive you are to us, the more we shall devote ourselves to drenching you; and in the end you will be much wetter than you were in that excursion to Eigg—though I *should* have liked very

much to have been there," she added, with a half-tone of regret. "Won't you tell me something more about those caves? But oh! I mustn't listen now, for I see Liz beckoning me to come and take her place at the piano; and afterwards you'll all want something to eat. We don't have regular suppers; but Louie and I have cut a mountain of sandwiches for you, and I have made a tipsy-cake as well. Englishmen always like tipsy-cake, I know. *Vamos!*"

* * * * *

"Well, master Frank, you're a nice young man for a fellow to have charge of!" said Carnegie with a kind of good-humoured impatience, as a little after twelve they left the Hardys', and strolled through the lamplit streets in the direction of the Hotel Oriental, where they were putting up for the night. "Here I go to the trouble of putting you on your guard against a girl who, I know, would like nothing better than to make a conquest of you; and you show your appreciation of my advice by flinging yourself desperately at her feet, and spooning with her for a whole evening. Do you know what Mrs. Beauchamp told me—that she's engaged, or all but, to a little black-muzzled native who, luckily for you, perhaps, wasn't there to-night? But I believe you *want* to get into a mess. I shall write to Lady Melville——"

"Engaged, is she?" said Frank, quite equably. "Well, I

think she will make a very nice wife: too nice a one for a Spaniard perhaps; but you needn't excite yourself about it, old fellow, all the same; or write to the mother either. The fact is, clever as you are, you don't understand women in the least, and I'm sorry for it, for it makes you beastly unjust to them, and to these Miss Hardys in particular. Do you think I'm such a coxcomb as not to know that if that second one talked to me a good bit this evening, it was only out of pure, unselfish good-nature, because I had told her I couldn't dance on account of my sprained shoulder; and I suppose she thought, being a stranger, I should feel dull standing there by myself? I tell you honestly I liked her all the better for her kindness; but I'm not going to fall in love with her nevertheless, and for the best of reasons—I'm far too much in love with some one else! Why, Carnegie man, I meant to have told you before; but you must remember our old neighbours at Craig-darroch, and what friends Janie and the daughter were. Janie's 'angel-Alice', as we used to call her, is my 'angel' now, and we are to be married as soon as ever this cruise is over; and if there's one reason more than another that makes me stand up for Lil Hardy it's because there's something in her face (though of course it can't come up to Alice's—God bless her!) that reminds me of my own bonny wee lassie every time I——. Hullo! Take care there!"

Some one had been coming down the street behind them for some time, though the somewhat loud tones of the two Englishmen made the steps inaudible to them; but at this moment the other person, taking advantage of a place where the side pavement—always of the narrowest in South American towns—was scarcely wide enough for two people to walk abreast, thrust himself suddenly between Lieutenant Melville and the wall, and with such brutality that the former, taken by surprise, was jostled roughly into the gutters, and might have fallen if his friend, who was walking in the street by preference, had not caught him by the arm.

“Confound the clumsy brute!” cried Carnegie fiercely, as the offender passed on without even an apology, and disappeared round the corner, “what the d——l did he do that for? Did you tread on his toes?”

“On the contrary, he was behind us,” said Frank, half-laughing at his own summersault, as he took out his handkerchief to wipe off the mud which had splattered his trousers. “Never mind, Carnegie. I dare say the fellow was drunk, and didn’t see what he was doing.”

“Drunk? Nonsense! These natives never get drunk: don’t know how! That man *meant* to insult you. I wish I had seen his face.”

“And I am glad you didn’t, as we aren’t a couple of

midshipmen to get into a row with impunity ; and the admiral is rather particular on such matters," Melville said more gravely. " As to an intentional insult, how could it be, when I don't know a single native in the place, man or woman, and haven't even spoken to one (unless it be a waiter at the hotel) since I first landed ?" But although he spoke thus, with a quiet authority which had the effect of cooling Captain Carnegie's hasty ire, Frank could not help wondering in himself if his friend was right ; for in the livid, scowling face which had glared on him in passing he had recognised that one full of hatred and malice that earlier in the evening he had pointed out to Lil Hardy with a laugh ; and little as he knew of Spanish the muttered "*Maldito puerco de Ingles !*" which had accompanied the stranger's action, needed no interpreter to translate.

CHAPTER IV.

LISBETH.

“Un esprit adroit, facile, insinuant, sait éviter et surmonter les difficultés. Il se plie aisément à ce qu’il veut, il sait connaître l’esprit et l’humeur de ceux avec qui il traite, et en ménageant leurs intérêts il avance et il établit les siens.”—*La Rochefoucauld—Reflexions Diverses.*

“Marriage makes mothers, so we all suppose,
But mothers make the marriages, one knows ;
Then what can maid who loses mother do
But make the marriage and the mother too !”

Old Writer.

THE rude interruption to the young officers’ discourse had diverted both their minds from the subject of the Hardy girls ; but perhaps in any case, after his friend’s strictures and his own denial of them, Mr. Melville might have thought it better to omit one fact in connection with the topic which till then he had not had an opportunity of mentioning : namely, that before leaving the house he had promised to ride with the two elder young women on the following day but one.

It was Lil who proposed it. He had been saying some-

thing about hiring a horse in order to see what the country outside the town was like, when she said to him at once :

“Do, and then you can ride with *us*. Let me see—Liz and Mr. Campion”—with a slight gesture of her pretty head towards one of the afore-mentioned sheep-farmers—“were planning a ‘*puséo*’¹ for the day after to-morrow. He has two horses in town, and has offered to lend her one. If I go too, will you? Then I could show you something of the country. You would like that—no?”

Melville hesitated, colouring between surprise and gratitude. “Oh, thank you—if I may—I mean if Mr. Hardy would not think me intrusive, on such slight acquaintance—” he stammered, and then felt ashamed of himself because Lil’s prompt,

“*Papa?* Why, he is not going! He hardly *ever* rides with us,” was so frank in its amused surprise as to convince him that, however unusual or flattering the proposal, as coming from a young lady to an almost stranger, might sound to conventional English ears accustomed to the cautious slowness with which strangers here are admitted into anything like a participation in our home life, it was nothing but an ordinary, matter-of-course act of courtesy from this

¹ Excursion.

foreign-reared, English-speaking girl, born in a country where to ride or walk with a man two days after having made his acquaintance is as proper and natural as it is for one of our British maidens to waltz, or sit out a quadrille in the conservatory with a gentleman two minutes after his introduction to her.

Perhaps—viewed dispassionately—there *is* nothing more immoral or shocking in the one performance than the other. Yet when he was gone, Lil's invitation turned out to be not quite so simple a matter on this occasion as she had supposed, and occasioned some family discussion.

“What was it I heard that new man—Mr. Melville—say about Saturday and getting a horse?” Lisbeth asked as she and her sisters were putting out the lights and shutting up the house after their guests' departure, both Mr. Hardy and old Juana having retired to rest some time before; and Lil answered:

“He wants to go for a ride with us; and as you and Robert Champion are going, I thought, if I could manage to get some sort of a horse, we might take him too, and so make a party of four.”

“‘Some sort of a horse’!” Loo repeated mockingly. “Listen to that, Liz. As if—thanks to *Pedro el magnífico*—Lil wasn't always better mounted than any of us. After

all, though, he might not like to lend his horse, Lil, for you to ride with another admirer."

"Or I might not ask him," said Lil coldly. "I wonder if such an idea would occur to any one but you, Louie; I suppose there are some other horses to be got in Monte San Felipe besides those of Pedro Sanchez."

"*Pues no*,¹" said Loo equably. "Only I haven't heard of any others at your disposal, unless Mr. Melville has offered to bring one for you as well as for himself."

"I think he was in rather a hurry to offer *himself*," Lisbeth put in with a slight tone of petulance unusual in the quietest and most placid-tempered of the girls. "He might at least have waited till he knew that we wanted him. I don't know what Robert Campion will say. I am sure when he offered to take *me* with him he had no idea he was going with a regiment, and he can't endure naval men. It is most awkward."

"Oh, Liz, I am so sorry," exclaimed Lil, almost ready to cry from the reaction of sudden depression caused by her sister's unwonted displeasure, coming after the excitement of the evening's enjoyment. "I did not think you would mind. We generally go together, you know, if we can get horses and cavaliers for two; and it was not Mr.

¹ Certainly—Why not?

Melville's fault at all. I proposed it. I never thought that you—that Mr. Campion, I mean—wanted to go alone."

"Nor do I suppose he does : at least if so it was foolish of him to ask me to go with him," Lisbeth retorted, the more perversely because Lil's unlucky slip of the tongue had added to her annoyance, and yet genuinely ashamed of herself for the self-betrayal involved in showing any at all. It must be owned, however, that she had some excuse for the feeling, however undignified it might be : for Robert Campion was a very well-to-do "estanciero", owning a goodly number of square leagues of land with a comfortable house on it, and as many as ten thousand sheep. Besides, he was only in town for a few days ; the estancieros seldom as a rule coming up more than twice in the year to sell their wool and buy winter supplies ; and on the occasion of his last visit he had seemed quite as much inclined to admire Lil, or Laura Beauchamp, as herself : the first-named of those young ladies perhaps the most of the three. This time, however, it had been different ; for though only in town for a week, the two evenings which he had already spent at the Hardys' had been almost entirely devoted to the charms of her society. He had danced with her more than with any one else ; and therefore when, in answer to her complaint that she had not been on horseback for nearly three months, he said :

“I am going to see a man on business near the Cerrito tomorrow. It’s a pleasant ride, and I’ve got a second horse in town. Couldn’t you come too?” she had accepted with a pleased alacrity tempered with no more demurs than were needed for appearance’ sake ; and had asked herself later if it were not likely that he had made the proposal for some definite purpose : such, for instance, as to obtain an opportunity of saying something which it might not be as easy to say in a house where you were always as liable to be received by three girls as one. Of course if she had been *certain* that he wanted the opportunity she would have made one for him by the simple process of directing her sisters to keep out of the room next time he called ; Lisbeth’s mind, when undisturbed by sentiment, as on this occasion, being decidedly matter-of-fact on such points ; and the sisters would of course have obeyed her at once and without question ; but that was too strong a step to be taken except on perfectly indubitable grounds, so that now when Mr. Campion had relieved her of the difficulty by making an opportunity for himself it did seem hard that Lil should thrust herself in to spoil and nullify it.

Not, of course, that Lil had any intention of doing so ; nor that Liz suspected her of such meanness. The Hardy girls, as even Captain Carnegie had admitted, were always loyal to

one another; but in a community where women are many and men are few it could hardly have failed to happen but that two sisters so pretty, and at once so like and *unlike* one another, should have been posed against each other in unconscious rivalry by the capricious fancy of admirers, who to-day preferred one and to-morrow the other; and though Liz would as soon have thought of taking away a lover of Lil's as of suspecting the latter of wishing to do so by her, she did think (having a good memory of her own for such matters) that Lil might have remembered Mr. Campion's former indecision of preference, and have had more tact than to afford him an excuse for renewing it on this crucial occasion.

And all the time poor Lil was so far from thinking of Robert Campion at all in the affair that she could not even understand her sister's motive for annoyance, and was only troubled at the thought of how rude it would seem to Mr. Melville to write and put him off after herself inviting him to join the ride. Of course sooner than displease Liz that was what she must do; but fortunately at this juncture Lisbeth's better sense, aided perhaps by a certain mocking expression in the Elf's sharp child-face as she sat on a table swinging her long legs and small, white-slippered feet to and fro, came to her aid; and she even managed to laugh as she observed that if Lil had arranged it with Mr. Melville he could not of

course be disappointed, and Robert Campion must make up his mind to the enlargement of the party. For *her* part, she cared nothing about it either way, except that she didn't see how Lil was to get a horse. However, she supposed that could be managed.

It was fortunate for her that she had taken this tone before making herself ridiculous ; for as it happened, the question of Lil's horse was very easily settled, and in the last way that she could have suspected, for on the following morning she received a note from Mr. Campion which ran thus :

“DEAR MISS LIZ,

“Hadn't I better bring a third horse with me on Saturday in case one of your sisters would like to go too ? I had asked Dick Pelly to join us ; but he can't. He says, however, that he will lend his '*bayo*'¹ with pleasure. It has often carried a lady, and is so tame that even little Miss Loo needn't be afraid to trust herself upon it.”

I think that the one grain of comfort in this epistle, the reading of which brought a deep flush over Liz Hardy's face, was the mention of Loo's name. If it had been *Lil's*, the very genuine sentiment of contempt evoked by Mr. Campion's after-thought of prudence and self-protection (for so she read it) might have been exchanged for an equally genuine hatred. There are few things more offensive to a woman's pride than

¹ Bay.

for a man, in whose favour she has chosen to waive some question of propriety, to remember it himself, and for his own security; but to enlist for that security a member of her own sex, and one whom she has already recognised as a rival, is an additional insult. Robert Campion had spared her this last sting, and therefore, after the first burning sense of mortification, occasioned quite as much by the remembrance of her own words to her sister as by the unfortunate estanciero's innocent-sounding note, she was able to look on the latter in a calmer and more consolatory light.

After all, the arrangement as it now stood was really better than the original one, more especially as four are company though three are not, and would deprive Mrs. Beauchamp and Laura of the opportunity of saying spiteful things if it were to come out that she had been seen riding with Mr. Campion alone. Of course if the news of her engagement to him were to be announced simultaneously there would be no room for spiteful sayings; but suppose there were *no* such news to be announced! Doubtless it is the fashion in South America for young ladies to ride out with their gentlemen friends unchaperoned, and Liz was well aware of it; but she was also aware that it was not the fashion for *one* single young lady to ride out with a single gentleman unless they were related or engaged to one another: and that any girl doing so would

lay herself under the stigma of being considered decidedly fast ; a stigma which Lisbeth had no mind to undergo. For a little time indeed she had been indifferent to such censure, and, under the influence of a real and undeserved sorrow, had done foolish and reckless things ; but that was some while ago ; and she regretted that phase now, and hoped that others had forgotten it. Her strongest desire at present was to “ranger” herself, get married, and assume the headship of a household respectable and substantial enough to make her looked up to among her compatriots ; and, whatever Captain Carnegie might have found to say on the subject, I cannot say that I consider her ambition a wholly unworthy one. A woman may have loftier aims, but in this as in all things there are gradations of ascent. Captain Carnegie would have had no scruple in holding Lisbeth’s conduct in the present matter under the lash of the most scathing ridicule, and in describing her as having been foiled in a vulgar and deliberate plan to force or entrap an unwilling man into proposing to her, but one must be impartial to judge of these delicate points, and Captain Carnegie was not impartial. Fairly considered, Miss Hardy was undeserving of any such imputation. She wanted to be married, it is true, but that is a want which a good many of her sex share with her without any blame attaching to them ; and she was twenty-five years of

age, at which time of life in these quick ripening countries it is generally considered that if a woman means to be married she had better make haste about it. Here, in England, mothers with daughters on their hands are not fond of allowing those young ladies to pass the boundary-line of thirty. A Señora Orientalà draws that line at fifteen. The difference is wide, but—" *Quinze años*",¹ a stout and swarthy mamma, wrinkled, grey-haired, capless, and the shape of a pillow tied in two about the middle, will say to you if you express your admiration of her daughter, a tall, beautiful, robust creature with the eyes of a Cleopatra and the magnificent developments of a Libyan Venus, and you are bound to believe it, or cast a slur on the "señorita" for not having already exchanged that title for a more mature one. Robert Campion was not young himself. He was forty, decidedly stout, and not good-looking; if, on the other hand, he was a wealthy, prosperous man, good-natured, respectable, and with no taste for drinking, Liz was as young and fair as any Englishman could wish, pretty, graceful, with a perfect figure, plenty of good sense and temper, and a knowledge of housekeeping and management, which ought, with any sensible sheep-farmer, to more than overbalance the want of those 'ologies and accomplishments with which the "cultured" young ladies of our day

¹ Fifteen years.

are so filled to the brim. So far it must be owned that the bargain was quite a fair one, and that in thinking it over Liz saw that she had fully as much to give as to take. If Mr. Campion took the same view, and was prepared to like her enough to ask her to be his wife, and put his honour and happiness into her hands, that would be an additional merit on his side, as showing a certain depth of feeling and trust in her goodness which might well dispose her to like him, and be good to him in return.

The question was, *did* he take that view?—and it was with the simple idea of solving it that Liz had determined on the ride. If he did not, he was of course a very stupid, misleading person, and she had wasted time in thinking of him, that was all—but it is not fair to condemn any one without a trial; and (as is well known) men are at best awkward, blundering creatures, sadly incapable of making up their own minds, still more so of expressing them when made; and too often dependent in their matrimonial affairs on the propelling assistance of the mothers, aunts, or lady friends of the young ladies before whom they waver in undecided admiration, like a boy before a pastry-cook's window. Liz had no mother, aunt, or lady friend to take the initiative for her in this way. Was she therefore to be so very much blamed for being willing to give Mr. Campion so much assistance

herself as could be managed without compromise of her own dignity?

All things considered, I am of opinion that Carnegie's verdict on his pseudo ladylove was a brutally unfair one; and that in aiding a worthy but undecided wooer to come to a decision on a point which she at any rate could afford to regard quite impartially, Liz was acting with great good sense and benevolence, and showing a practical, well-balanced mind, far superior to that of poor Lil, whose only motive for wanting to go for the ride was the pleasure of fresh air and exercise, and of hearing more of Melville's talk about that far-off land which it was her fancy to think of as "home," and that higher sort of life which to him seemed as natural as breathing, and after which her mind was constantly sending out vague, misty yearnings, equally unsubstantial and unsatisfactory. I hope I have proved my case.

Lisbeth's note to Mr. Campion was at any rate a masterpiece of taste and decorum.

"DEAR MR. CAMPION,—Thanks so much for your kind thought. It is Lil who is going, not Louie, and we had intended to hire a mount for her; but she would much prefer Mr. Pelly's '*bayo*' if he is good-natured enough to lend it.

"Sincerely yours,

"LISBETH HARDY."

And afterwards she told Lil smilingly that they needn't trouble about a horse, as Mr. Campion would bring one for her too: it would look so bad for her to be mounted on one of those miserable hacks kept by Monte San Felipe livery-stables for the special delectation of men-o'-war's men and naval officers. Lil was in a blaze of gratitude directly.

"Did you ask him, Liz? I know you did. Well, that *was* good of you. *Gracias muchissimos!*" she exclaimed, jumping to conclusions in her usual hasty way: and I think it really must be allowed that Liz would have been more than woman—woman after the Fall at any rate—to have disclaimed the praise just then.

In her own mind, however, she was already beginning to take a much pleasanter view of the situation, which an hour or so before had seemed so mortifying. Very possibly Mr. Campion's after-thought had not been dictated by a selfish prudence, after all. Perhaps he still retained in all its integrity the intention for which she had given him credit; but not feeling so confident as to her reception of it as he might have been, was only anxious to be spared the risk of a long *tête-à-tête* ride home with a lady who had just refused him. It is easy enough to say three words when cantering side by side along a good road without making yourself at all audible to a person riding near by; but supposing those words to be

answered by a "No," the third person becomes at once very useful in covering the humiliation of their propounder : and a man does not deserve to be despised for having sufficient diffidence to contemplate such a possibility. Liz very wisely determined not to despise Mr. Champion till he had given her better and more irrefragable cause for such a sentiment. In the mean time she was grateful for the discretion which had enabled her to keep her first sense of indignation and its cause in her own breast, instead of letting it leak out before her sisters, as Lil, from natural transparency, and Loo, from sheer recklessness and hardihood, would have been sure to do.

CHAPTER V.

A "PASÉO" ON HORSEBACK.

"As she fled fast thro' sun and shade,
The happy winds upon her played,
Blowing the ringlet from the braid :
She looked so lovely as she swayed
The rein with dainty finger-tips."

'Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere.'

"And if amid a scene, a shock so rude,
Some native blood was seen my streets to dye,
A traitor only fell beneath the feud."

'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.'

PERHAPS the two elder Hardy girls never looked better under any circumstances than in the saddle, and with a good horse under them. Some girls show to most advantage in the ball-room, and under the influence of gas-light and rich attire. To others the morning sunshine and simple morning dress lend a special charm equally attractive in its way. I once heard a man, a naval officer and not very young, tell of the girl to whom he was then engaged to be married, that he had proposed to her because she looked "so *crisp*" when he called on her father early in the morning. Pressed as to

what she had on, or whether she was beautiful, animated, or possessed other qualifications, he became vague. He was not sure as to any of these things, except that she wore cotton gowns, and that no one could have helped falling in love with her, she looked so "crisp"! What he meant I perfectly comprehend, and fully appreciate the charm conveyed in the meaning; though he himself must have felt it by contrast, being a heavy, coarse-visaged, untidy man, addicted to drinking, and "crisp" in no sense of the word except the slang rendering of "fresh". But this is a digression. To return to the Hardy girls, it must be said for Lil's credit, that there were people ready to swear that in each of the above-named situations she not only appeared at her best, but that that "best" was better than most other girls. To my mind, however, and to that of many others, there was something in the saddle-seat which set off the tender, swaying curves of her young and slender figure, in the breeze blowing back the curly golden locks from under her close velvet cap, in the small, erect head and sparkling eyes, the lips apart for pleasure, and cheeks tinged with that faint rosy glow which was the only charm usually wanting to them, which made the second Miss Hardy even more irresistible on horseback than elsewhere; and to young Melville she looked like the very embodiment of youth, spring, and

joyousness, as side by side they clattered over the stony, ill-paved streets in their passage through the town.

A quaint ride it was to him—past wretched “adobe” hovels crumbling into ruin, and built alongside of grand mansions with marble fronts and hospitably open doorways, through which one caught tempting glimpses of cool “patios” with glittering fountains, and shaded by palms and oleander trees within : past shops small and insignificant as to window-front, but bristling with all manner of signs, gilded and coloured, golden anchors and silver lambs, roaring lions and lovely ladies, recalling by their old world grotesqueness the ancient glories of Cheapside in the middle ages : past shrines at street-corners where livid and bleeding Christs, with every wound and bruise depicted in ghastly realism, stared down from dark niches on a swarthy “gaucho” crossing himself with hand just loosened from the knife which yesterday cut his best friend’s throat over a game of “moro”; or a mulatta “cocotte”, half-ducking her knee while still leering over her fan at a “caballero” on the opposite side of the street : past swarms of velvety-eyed, brown-skinned Spanish children rushing out to shout *vivas* after the foreigners in the hope of getting a *vinten*¹ or two flung them in return : past negro ranchos with their untidy little patches of maize

¹ Penny.

or pumpkins in the rear, and their black and unctuous-skinned inhabitants basking in the sun outside the door; the gentleman most frequently with his head in his wife's lap and a cigarette in his mouth, the while she devoted herself to domestic operations among his wool, the nature of which need not be further described: past brick-fields smelling inodorously in the hot glare, and awakening compassion by the sight of the one ghastly, half-starved mule, cased from the point of his ragged ears to the stump of his mutilated tail in a coating of hard grey mud, baked into almost pottery on the upper part, and cracking off at every angle where the miserable bones protrude from the skin; a creature fastened to a pole in the middle of a shallow pool of mud, and condemned hour by hour to gyrate around it in an endless, monotonous circle to the flicks of a whip wielded by a half-naked Indian lad splashed from head to foot by the unsavoury substance, which, when sufficiently stiffened and fashioned into rude bricks, was spread out in rows to dry and bake in the sun before being used for building purposes.

"This isn't very pleasant, is it?" said Lil, looking up apologetically into Melville's eyes as they trotted slowly along the broad road where every hoof-stroke raised a dense cloud of white, gritty dust which filled the whole air and settled down again in a thick powdery veil on the melancholy rows

of grey spiked aloes and bristling cacti which hedged them in on either side. "You look almost choked ; but take heart. It won't last long, *gracias à Dios !*"—and indeed she was right ; for in a few minutes more the two equestrians in front took a sudden turn to the right, and they speedily found themselves entering on a much pleasanter road running between pretty white-walled villas, or "quintas"¹, built in every form of fantastic architecture from a Chinese pagoda to a Turkish mosque, and surrounded by gay flower-gardens, orange-groves, and orchards of fig, pear, and plum trees, so laden with luscious fruit, that to gaze through the boughs seemed like a peep into the famed gardens of Armida hung with translucent jewels, purple, gold, and green ; and moved the thirsty passer-by to longings of impotent desire. The very hedges here were of peach or quince, and a little brook made a pleasant, gurgling sound as it ran along a deep ditch outside them. Lil laughed at Melville's exclamations of pleasure.

"Ah," she said, "I often wish we had a quinta out here, and could come to it in the hot season, as everybody who is anybody does. This is *the* fashionable suburb, you know, where nearly all the rich townspeople live in the summer. The men all ride or drive out in the evenings, and you can't think how pleasant and cool it is after the suffocating glare in

¹ Country houses.

the city ; but we are not rich enough to afford a house in the Paso del Molino, at least so father says ; so Louie and I live in hopes that Liz will marry some wealthy man with a quinta of his own, and then we can come and stay with her. There, do you see that house with the tower and battlements like a Gothic castle ?—that is the Minister of War's quinta, and the pretty little pagoda close by is rented by the French *chargé d'affaires*. I dare say if you look hard enough you may get a glimpse of Mdlle. de Lalouze swinging in her hammock in that grove of eucalyptus trees. They say she gets into it after breakfast with a bag of chocolate-creams and a novel, and never gets out of it again till both are finished, and it is time to bathe and dress for dinner. The quinta belongs to a General Pereira ; but he was in the last ' Blanco ' revolution, and was banished as a traitor by this Government ; so it is a very good thing for him to have been able to let it."

Melville laughed.

"Revolutions are things which occur about once in every two months, aren't they ?" he asked gaily.

But Lil answered him with half-offended gravity.

"Indeed no ! Why it is—it is nearly two years since we had one ; and that was not much of an affair. There was a *pronunciamento*, and a few barricades put up, and a little shooting ; but that was all. It was over in a couple of days.

The Government had had warning of it, and put it down very easily, and two or three of the common people engaged in it were killed, and the leaders banished as traitors. One of the men"—speaking quite naturally and coolly—"was shot in the street just in front of our house."

"Good Heavens!" cried Melville, as much startled by her manner as by the information. "You don't mean that! And you—you *saw* it?"

"No, *I* didn't," said Lil quietly; "in fact, I have never seen any one killed, except at a bull-fight. When there is a revolution we ladies shut the front-door, put up the window-shutters, and stay at home; but on this occasion Louie heard our servant call out that some soldiers were coming up the street with a prisoner, and she ran up to the *azotea*¹ and peeped through the balustrade. He was a tall, fair-skinned young fellow, bareheaded, and with his arms tied behind him with a piece of rope. As he came in front of our house he managed to wrench one arm free, and made a rush as if to escape. The soldiers were too quick for him, however. They caught him before he got three yards, tied him up again, and pushed him against the wall of the opposite house; and then one of them just stepped off the pavement into the middle of the street and shot him. He fell right over on his face dead;

¹ The flat roof of the house.

and they picked him up and carried him off—*Basta !*”¹ with a slight shudder—“don’t let us talk more of it. It always makes me a little sick ; for when we went out very early next morning after all was over, and the town quiet again, there was a big, red stain on the plaster of the wall. A *cellador*² came and washed it away later ; but it was there when Juana and I went to the fruit-market, and we saw it—Ah ! Liz and Mr. Campion are stopping at the Quinta Disgraciada. I thought we should rest there.”

Whilst talking they had left the pretty suburb behind, and were now riding across a wide stretch of open, uncultivated country, covered with short grass, burnt to an uniform dull yellow by the sun, and broken only by a broad, worn track, deeply cut up by bullock-waggon, and which seemed to lead in the direction of a low, round-topped hill surmounted by a ruined fort, and looking not at all unlike a slop-basin turned upside down upon the otherwise table-like flatness of the surrounding plain. Between them and it, however, a narrower track diverged towards a slight depression in the ground, above which showed the foliage of a clump of willows and other trees surrounding the white walls of a quinta which stood alone, and at some distance from any other residence.

The hedge which had once surrounded it was gone, broken

¹ Enough.

² Policeman.

down and levelled to the ground ; and the huge gate-posts which had marked the entrance to the front avenue stood up like forlorn sentinels, or modern versions of Lot's wife turned into pillars of brick instead of salt. Even the avenue itself had nearly disappeared, many of the trees having been cut down and carried off for firewood ; while others were lying across the pathway which was overgrown with rank grass, thistles, and weeds : some of the latter, covered with brilliant crimson blossoms which would have rejoiced the heart of a European florist, though here they were only known under the vulgar nickname of "Don Juan", and were hardly considered by the negro children as worth sticking in their greasy wool.

Up at the house matters looked still more desolate ; for the broad steps of white marble which had led up to the front piazza were split and broken into a dozen pieces, as if by some hand of wanton malice ; the walls were riddled with shot and shell, and through the arched window-frames and lofty doorways, open alike to sun and storm, one could see into the deserted rooms, some roofless, some with the floor gone, and long grass and weeds mingled with festoons of wild passion-flower laden with golden fruit growing in its place, and hiding with their tangled luxuriance the *débris* of broken pottery, fragments of gilt picture-frames, and—more pathetic

still in its sad suggestiveness of a ruined home—the hood of a baby's cradle still littering the ground.

Not a human being was in sight. The place seemed to be utterly tenantless and deserted, except by the humming-birds and scarlet cardinals which flashed to and fro like flakes of green and ruby fire through the still and throbbing atmosphere, and the colony of frogs which kept up a constant noisy croaking from a marshy pond at the bottom of the forsaken gardens.

Melville's exclamation of horrified surprise brought Lil's ready laugh to her lips in a merry ripple.

"Ah," she said, "I told you the place was called the Quinta *Disgraciada*!¹ Don't you think the name suitable? You wouldn't wonder that it looks so if you knew all it had been through, poor house! But Liz and Mr. Campion are not dismounting. Well, good people, what is it? Aren't we going to rest here?"

"I was just saying to your sister," said Mr. Campion, a big, heavily-built man with a bald head without much back to it, a florid face, and a weak chin concealed under a bushy red beard, "that as it's still very hot, and the '*saladero*' where I'm bound (I've got to look at a machine for cutting up meat, Donovan and I have been inventing) is nearly a mile

¹ Unfortunate.

off, you three might like to rest here in the shade till I get back, when we can all ride home in the cool. It's no good dragging you up there; and the smell of a '*saladero*' ain't pleasant for señoritas."

"And I tell him," said Liz with very pretty animation, though there was a tired look in her blue eyes—such a one perhaps as that which shaded La Maintenon's when she wrote about the labour of "amusing an unamusable king"—"that we are not fashionable señoritas to mind a mile more or less, or the smell of a few hides. Besides, *I* want to see the machine too. Mr. Champion has been telling me all about it, and I think it must be quite a marvel for ingenuity and—— But I forgot, Lil, you *do* get a headache sometimes if you come near strong odours. Perhaps you and Mr. Melville would rather wait here? Would you? Don't mind about me; for though I own I should be disappointed not to see the machine after hearing so much about it, I——"

"But why should you miss it?" said Lil quickly. There was a peculiar intonation in the elder Miss Hardy's voice, and a half-conscious expression in her face as she turned it momentarily full on her sister, which recalled to the latter what Liz had said about Mr. Champion's primary desire for a *partie à deux* instead of *à quatre*, as it had been made by the subsequent introduction of herself and Mr. Melville into it.

It flashed upon her for the first time that Robert Campion had been rather attentive to Liz of late, and that one or two of their friends had joked her about him. For herself, Lil held the big, slow-witted estanciero in somewhat low estimation, so much so indeed that till this moment she had not dreamt of Liz doing otherwise; but that look in her sister's eyes had suggested a different possibility, and startling as it was she had quickness enough to act on it immediately. After all, she was riding Mr. Campion's horse, or his friend's horse at any rate; it was owing to his invitation that they were enjoying the "paséo" at all; and therefore if, knowing her aversion to smells, he had proposed this rest at the quinta on purpose to get rid of her and Mr. Melville, and so secure Liz to himself for a few minutes, she could not be so unamiable as to thwart him.

"Why shouldn't you go on, and let me stay here?" she added pleasantly, though looking down on her horse's mane to hide the sparkle of fun in her eyes. "I'm too stupid to understand machines when I see them; and I own I do most heartily hate 'saladeros.' Take Liz with you, Mr. Campion, and Mr. Melville and I will wait here comfortably for you. You won't *mind* staying here with me while they go on, will you, Mr. Melville?" turning her bright, laughing face suddenly to his.

"I should be very impolite if I said that I would," Melville answered, smiling too, but without any sense of flattery from the suggestion, though he was of course unable to guess at the undercurrent of ideas in Lil's mind that had prompted it. Indeed, despite all Captain Carnegie's warnings, it seemed impossible to him to misunderstand the young girl's frank cordiality and confidence in him—a confidence which matched his own natural simplicity to perfection, and made him feel towards her as if she were a young relative, or some one he had known for years. "I am very stupid about machines too, Miss Hardy," he added, looking at Liz; "but if you will trust me to look after your sister while you are gone, I will try to make up for my mechanical dulness by taking good care of her."

"Why, if this is your first visit to Uruguay, Mr.—a—Melville, it's *you* who ought to see Donovan's saladero," Mr. Champion put in, addressing the sailor for the first time, and with what Liz felt to be unpleasant briskness. "After all, it's only a mile more, Miss Lil——"

"*Only* a mile, Mr. Champion! which is just a mile too far for me. Please remember what you said just now, and that if Liz disclaims being a fashionable señorita, I don't. As the magnificent Roderick Dhu once observed, 'Come one, come all, this rock shall fly, from its firm base as soon as I.' Mr. Melville can do as he pleases."

"Or as *you* please!" said Liz playfully. "Mr. Melville, as you are so good-natured, please take care of her. Steady, steady, you beauty! Mr. Champion, your '*rosilla*'¹ doesn't like standing"—and as indeed the horse she was riding did seem somewhat impatient to proceed on its way, its owner had no resource but to let it have its will, and lead the way into the road again where the two speedily disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Liz flung her reins over the pommel, and swung herself lightly to the ground without even waiting to be assisted.

"Joy go with them!" she said lightly. "Mr. Melville, do you know how to hobble a horse? Oh! thanks, I meant your own. I can do mine for myself!" but when Melville insisted on performing the office for her she did not object, but stood looking on with mischievously dimpled cheeks at his rather clumsy operations, and then saying, "Come, and sit down," led the way to the front of the ruined house, where, gathering her habit closely round her for fear of snakes, she perched herself on a huge block of marble, broken from one of the steps, and leant her back against the trunk of an old, gnarled oleander tree, whose grey-green foliage and showers of rosy blossoms swayed gently in the warm breeze overhead; and formed, together with the

¹ Chestnut horse.

shadow of the deserted building behind them, a delightful shelter from the sultry rays of the afternoon sun.

Melville took his seat on the step below her, and looked up at her smilingly.

“I think this is very pleasant—pleasanter than machines, even meat-chopping ones!” he said with a spice of boyish sauciness, and Lil laughed.

They looked at that moment uncommonly like two happy children who had stolen away for a frolic.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE QUINTA DISGRACIADA.

"In every conversation of two there are six persons—each speaker as he is, each as he believes himself to be, and each as he seems to the other."—*O. W. Holmes.*

"Il n'est rien de plus naturel ni de plus trompeur que de croire qu'on est aimée."—*'Maximes de La Rochefoucauld.'*

"Heart affluence in discursive talk."—*Tennyson*—*'In Memoriam.'*

"THEN you *really* didn't want to see the saladero?" Liz said, after they had sat for a few minutes silent and enjoying the rest and comparative coolness. Melville shook his head.

"I don't want to see anything at present but the view before me, or to be anywhere but where I am. You, I suppose, are used to this sort of temperature; but even under a sun-helmet," taking his off as he spoke and brushing the damp, curly hair off his temples, "I am free to own that my brains feel pretty well roasted. I want to own something else, however—I don't in the least know what a '*saladero*' is—unless it's a manufactory. Is it?"

Liz burst out laughing.

"A manufactory! No, certainly not. Why it is a—a—what *do* you call it in English?—a killing-house, is that the word?"

"A killing—you mean a slaughter-house?" Melville said it rather dubiously. "But no, surely not. Your sister wouldn't have gone there?"

"Yes, a slaughter-house, but on a large scale, you know, where they kill hundreds of cattle for the hides and tallow as well as the meat. Donovan's do a lot of export business in that tinned beef, and this is only one of their smaller saladeros, and rather a show place. They are horrible spots, however—nothing but rows and rows of raw hides hung up to dry, and piles of bones and flies . . . Oh! the flies!—millions and millions and *millions* of them! and an awful smell of warm blood and tar and old hoofs mixed up in a general haze of decomposition."

"Don't, for goodness' sake, Miss Hardy!" cried Melville, shuddering frankly. "And your sister has gone—*there*!"

"Well, I do rather wonder at her, I own," said Lil. In her heart she wondered very much; but an instinct of loyalty to her sister made her modify the statement, and add quickly as in extenuation: "But there is the machine to see, you know. It is something that Robert Campion and young Donovan have been inventing for cutting up the meat more

quickly ; and I suppose he wanted to show it to her. Liz is very clever, much more so than I. She understands all those sorts of things, and takes an interest in them. Besides, as I said, Donovan's is rather a smart show place of the kind. New Englishmen are often taken out to see it. Why do you sigh ? ”

“ For relief,” said Melville, smiling up at her. “ If you had said *always* I think I should have run away and begged the Admiral to stop my leave for the rest of my stay here. That word ‘ often ’ stopped me. It implies that some ‘ new Englishmen ’ at any rate are exempted from the ordeal.”

Lil laughed again. She was looking wonderfully pretty at the moment, with her slender figure in its close-fitting, dark green habit, relieved against the grey, mossy trunk of the old tree, one rounded, tapering arm and delicate bare hand resting on the marble step close to his cheek, her small fair head cut out against a broidery of leaves and blossoms woven over spaces of intensely blue sky.

“ After all,” she said contentedly, “ I am very glad you don't want to improve your mind in that direction ; for if you did, I suppose I should have to go too, and it is certainly much nicer to be lazy and stay here. Directly he suggested it, I thought what a lovely talk we could have. I have been wanting another with you so much, and one can't talk

properly on horseback, can one? Besides, it is so much nicer when there is no one to interrupt."

"Yes?" said Melville enquiringly. Even his simplicity was a little startled. Lil nodded.

"Yes, I want you to tell me more about home—England, I mean. You were interrupted the other evening, and I was sorry. I have been thinking about it ever since. I wanted to hear more. After all it *is* home, though I have never seen it; and both books and people generally tell you of the outside things—the unusual ones. Anthony Trollope doesn't; that is why I like him; nor Dickens—always; but after all, no book pictures sound as real as 'talk' ones."

"But I was telling you of Scotland, not England; and your family is not a Scotch one; so my home pictures and yours would be different in any case."

"Different! Why England and Scotland are all one, are not they? Two names for different ends of the same island, and such a tiny island too! It can't matter much which end you belong to."

"I should like any loyal 'Hielandman', or even my own mother, to hear you say that," said Melville much amused. "How indignant they would be! Let me tell you, Miss Hardy, that, small as that little island looks on the map, it contains three entirely different countries and races; and

each is as far from the others in its own estimation, as you here are from Australia or San Francisco. Why, English country folks call moving from one county into another 'going to foreign parts'; and lots of Scotch people have never been into England in their lives. I don't think my sister has ever got further south than York."

"What—not to *London*!"

"Oh dear no. Why, she has never even been in Edinburgh. My father hasn't liked going about since he became blind, and my mother doesn't like leaving him; so of course Janie can't go either."

"If I were she there would be no '*can't*' in the case," said Lil quickly. "What, live in the same country—for it is the same, whatever you may call it—with no sea, not even a river, nothing but one day and one night's journey between you and the greatest city in the world; the city which has Westminster Abbey, and the Tower, and the National Gallery in it: the city which 'little Nell' wandered out of, and where Charles was beheaded; and you can still see the street where Milton lived, and the inn where Shakspeare's plays were first acted; and the very stones that 'Barnaby' must have been dragged over out of the blazing ruins of Newgate! Be as near it as all that, and never go to it!—*I* would."

"What, alone?" asked Melville, smiling in spite of himself at her childish enthusiasm and jumble of associations. "For we have no relations or friends in London, and she has not got me to take her about."

"Alone and barefoot, if better mightn't be," Lil retorted almost fiercely. "What would relations or friends matter? One would have the *place*."

"I am afraid you are more adventurous than wee Janie," said Melville quietly. "One place would be much the same as another to her without her relations and friends—her father and mother that is. The mere thought that they were away and wanting her would spoil it all."

Lil flushed suddenly. The slight touch of coolness in Mr. Melville's tone made her feel as if he had rebuked her, as if he thought her bold or unwomanly, and the idea gave her so much pain she could not rest under it without attempting to justify herself.

"But if they *didn't* want her," she said quite low and humbly; though indeed it was not Lil's habit to be humble with men, and she herself could not have told what it was that made her so with this one—"if she had no mother; and if, though she loved her father, she knew that he did not care to have her with him; that she was no real good to him at all."

“A loving woman’s presence is always of real good in every household,” said Melville, “and perhaps it is wanted the most where from its unobtrusive sweetness and humility it seems to find least recognition. There are men who never *seem* to care, even if they harbour an angel on their hearth-stone; yet if it were to spread its wings and leave them, they would set seven devils in its place, and plead in extenuation, ‘Because I was forsaken!’ It is hard on the angel, very hard, but at least she ought not to shut her eyes to the worth and sanctity of her office. Others can see it well enough.”

Insensibly Melville’s tones had grown deeper and more earnest, till they became almost fervent. His brown eyes with their grave, intent expression were gazing full into Lil’s, and there was a slight tremble in his voice, as though he would have said even more, had he dared. Yet in truth he was not thinking of her. He did not even see her. He had forgotten to whom he was speaking. His mind was far away among his own Scottish hills with a motherless girl, the angel of a household where everything round her seemed a desecration of her own sweet unselfishness; yet to which she clung with a pitiful tenderness which kept him who loved her waiting for her even then. Lil’s words, some stray light in Lil’s face, had brought her into his mind. It was she to whom he was speaking when he answered Lil; but

how could the South American girl know that? All through the afternoon, she had been chatting to him with perfect simplicity of intention, perfect innocence of anything beyond a very cordial liking for her companion, and a desire unexpressed even to herself, though she would have felt no shame in avowing it if challenged so to do, that he might like her in return. But the sudden fervency of the young man's tone, and the almost passionate depth in his gaze as it met hers, struck a new chord in her breast, and set her pulses thrilling. Loo's sharp raillery, too constantly on the ripple, whether there was occasion for it or not, to awaken anything but a passing sense of impatience or annoyance, came back to her now in the guise of a keen-sighted prescience, and made her tremble with a strange sense of shy pleasure mingling with a stranger one of pain and unworthiness. Had he in truth so high an ideal of her as this? But alas, how utterly, absurdly unlike her it was! Her cheek had flushed to a bright crimson as she answered him, low and almost timidly :

"I am afraid, Mr. Melville, you think too well of—women." Melville interrupted her warmly.

"Not of *some* women! I could not"—then, recalled to himself, less by the sound of his own voice than by the latent echo of hers, coloured up at the recognition of his

abstraction, and to cover it added in a more conventional manner :

“ You ought not to think so, for I am sure you would be greatly missed from your home.”

Lil's eyes drooped and her roses deepened. He *had* meant her then, she said to herself, and yet what could he have seen in their careless, brusque, unsentimental home life to warrant so high a tribute to her? And poor papa! he was unresponsive and rather morose, but . . . “ *seven devils* ”!

“ Why? What makes you fancy that? ” she asked rather hurriedly. Frank looked surprised.

“ What? Well, is it not a natural fancy? I expect your father or sisters would say so if we appealed to them.”

“ But you spoke—you were describing a very good woman: and I am not—I wish I were—but, indeed I am not that,” Lil persisted, a tone of timid appeal thrilling through her desire for honesty. It touched him, and though he smiled, his reply was very gentle.

“ I might say, What makes *you* fancy that? only that I know the answer beforehand.”

“ What is it? ”

“ Good women who think themselves so are seldom very good.”

“ Then goodness ”—smiling a little, though still rather

nervously—"can't be much comfort to the better ones, after all."

"Except the comfort in what some one else thinks of them."

The blue eyes facing him looked up bashfully from under their long lashes.

"You mean their . . . friends?" and then the lashes came down altogether, and there was a lovelier blush at the recognition of her own audacity. Melville was a Scotchman, a religious man and a sailor; and there is no religious man so deeply and unashamedly religious as one who is both a sailor and a Scotchman.

"I mean the *One* who is her best Friend," he answered, simply and gravely. Rather to his surprise, Lil sprang up and stepped on to the piazza with a movement so hasty as to take her face out of sight before he knew what she was going to do.

"I—I am quite rested now," she said quickly. "Don't you want to see the view from here; and then we could go down into the quinta and get some fruit?"

She had moved further off as she spoke, and Melville rose from his seat and followed her in silence. In truth he was rather vexed both with himself and her. Naturally, he interpreted her sudden termination to their discourse as a

sign that she considered his remark as too serious, or in bad taste ; and though it was of course a sign of levity that she should think so, he felt (being only a young man after all) some slight mortification at having given her an opportunity of snubbing him. "How differently his Alice would have answered such a suggestion !" he thought. "But Carnegie was right." And after all, they were both wrong, for poor Lil was so utterly ignorant of his meaning that she understood him to refer to *himself* ; and her sudden move arose simply and solely from that virginal instinct of flight natural to most young maiden things at the first plain expression of affection from one of the other sex for whom they have already conceived a strong liking. She was standing at the further end of the piazza when he got up to her, the folds of her riding-habit gathered up in one little hand, while the other was stretched out and pointing over the wilderness of rough twisted trunks and broad green foliage, all intertwined and overgrown with weeds and briars, of what had once been an orchard of fig-trees below her. Beyond it lay a field of golden maize, and beyond that again the broad strip of grassy country across which they had come, bounded on the right by a long, level flat of wet, grey mud, gleaming like silver at present in the low sunlight, with lines of stakes driven into it here and there like rows of black, jagged

teeth, and merging gradually into a broad, semi-circular shine of blue water, the head of the bay on the further side of which the city was built, and round which their afternoon's ride had led.

It was low tide now, and the mud was dotted over with innumerable marine birds looking like white specks as they dabbled for food in the soft, odoriferous substance ; while at some distance out a whole shoal of tiny fishing craft of every rig and cut were rocking on the shining, sparkling waters ; and further still merchantmen and men-of-war of light draught lay crowded together in a picturesque jumble of masts and funnels and bright-coloured bunting, dominated on one side by the "*monte*" itself, from which San Felipe takes its name—a round-topped hill with a lighthouse on its summit, and on the other by the white walls and lofty "*miradors*" of the city, with the dome of the cathedral towering over all, and basking and glowing in the rays of the afternoon sun.

There was not much in the scene to those who had looked on far more beautiful and picturesque ones, though it looked bright and pretty enough with the dazzling blue of a cloudless sky above, and the vivid emerald of a field of wheat (they can raise two crops a year in those favoured climates) sloping down to meet the sea of deeper verdure, the ripe mingling of fruit and foliage in the desecrated orchard at their feet ; so

Melville only gave it such brief attention as courtesy required, before turning to the much prettier picture made by Lil herself, as she stood leaning back, with one slender arm wound for support around the bough of a huge magnolia, whose bunches of dark polished leaves and snowy flower-cups, looking as though carved out of wax, waved low over her head and loaded the air with fragrance; her graceful figure relieved against the yellowish stucco of the wall behind her; the soft outline of her cheek, still flushed with maidenly shamefacedness, turned a little away, so that only a little rosy ear and coil of fair hair nestling softly down upon the nape of the warm, milk-white throat beneath invited the gaze of the beholder.

Greuze would have risen out of his grave to paint her. Tissot would have liked to have knelt at her feet while he sketched in the graceful figure amid the warm harmonies of its surroundings. Frank Melville may have seen the beauty or not, but thought nothing of it, being preoccupied with another idea. His words as he turned to her expressed it with abrupt if candid formality.

“I am afraid my last remark offended you, Miss Hardy. Will you forgive me for it? We sailors get into rough ways of speaking out our thoughts as they come, forgetting that they may be distasteful—”

“ Oh, but you did not—I mean I was not at all offended. How could I be ? ” Lil interrupted quickly, and with a blind sort of instinct that, though she did not know what he was going on to say, showed she was not ready for it, and would rather stave it off. “ I only jumped up in that impetuous way because I remembered I hadn’t shown you the view yet, and that Liz would be sure to exclaim at me if she came back and found we had omitted that duty. We are very proud of anything like a view in this flat place, you know. Indeed the Sanchez—friends of ours to whom this house belongs—called it the *Quinta Bella Vista* before its misfortunes got it the name of *Disgraciada* instead. But perhaps you would rather go down and look for fruit ? We will if you like, eh ? ”

“ Well, my mother always called me a greedy boy, and if the boy be father to the man, that proposal is almost too tempting to be said ‘ no ’ to,” said Melville pleasantly. Relieved by Lil’s assurance that he had not offended her, which his own truthfulness made him accept without questioning, he was quite ready to enjoy himself again. “ Have you any idea of the mountains of fruit which leave your markets every morning, Miss Hardy, for Her Majesty’s ships of war ? And after a hot ride the very word is refreshing. But first, do tell me the story of this knocked-to-pieces mansion, and how it

got the unpronounceable name to which you allude, which, I suppose, means disgraced."

Lil burst out laughing.

"*Disgraciada* means unfortunate, not disgraced ; and if you only look at the position of the quinta as it lies in a direct line between that hill there with the ruined fort on it, and the suburbs of Monte San Felipe, you'll see that it couldn't be in a more unfortunate situation when fighting is going on in these parts, especially as it is too far from town to be protected from there. When the Sanchez first built the house, and furnished it, they were very proud of it, and indeed it was quite beautiful. All the furniture and fittings were brought from Paris, and there were statues of Italian marble at each corner of the piazza—do you see the head of one lying there covered with moss among those pumpkin plants?—and a little bit of lawn sown with *real* English grass (of course no one ever walked on it or it wouldn't have grown), and a fountain all made of majolica in the front 'patio' ; but only three years after it was finished there was a revolution ; the Sanchez, who belong to the 'Blanco' party, were mixed up in it, and had to fly the country. Their quinta fell into the hands of 'Colorado' soldiers who sacked it, broke all the statues, used the china fountains for a target and the salon for a guard-room ; and were driven out in their turn by the Blancos when

the latter had had time to rally and get the better of things. It cost a lot of fighting though. They say there were seventeen dead bodies between the third tree in the avenue and the bottom of the steps—and I don't know what the Sanchez spent in putting the place in even decent order again! Then, just a year after it was finished, there came a fresh upset. The Colorados, with Brazil for an ally, besieged Monte San Felipe by sea and land; and from that hill there shelled the town. *Ay de mi!*—don't I remember how pleasantly exciting it was! Frightened? Nonsense, why should we be frightened? Why, Liz and I used to stand on the roof of our house to watch the white puffs of smoke come skip, skip, skipping over the flat country towards us. You see *we* knew we were out of range; but the poor *Quinta Bella Vista* wasn't. The enemy's soldiery took possession of it, the crops were all cut down to feed their horses, more than half the trees were felled for firewood; and as to the house, it got fairly knocked to pieces—(look at that shell bedded in the library wall there!)—just as you see it. The Sanchez lost heart to build it up again, and so it stays as it is, and people call it the *Quinta Disgraciada*. The family have put an old Italian in charge of it, and he and his old Indian wife live down in an 'adobe'¹ rancho at the bottom of the maize field there.

¹ Brick made of mud, and baked in the sun.

He grows a few vegetables, attends to the crops, and sends up what fruit is left to the market ; but I don't think he'll even send as much as usual this week."

"Why not?"

"Because you and I are going to gather and eat all we can now," and with a merry laugh the girl gathered her habit round her and sprang down off the ruined masonry into the orchard.

Melville followed as promptly. It was pleasant enough on that balmy afternoon and under that turquoise sky to wander about sheltered from the hot sun-rays by a fretwork of green leaves, now stooping to pick up a pear larger, juicier, and a thousand times more toothsome mellow than the finest Jersey variety ; now tossing your companion a handful of ripe green figs ; now starting back from a bough laden with purple, bloomy plums at her warning cry of "Ware snakes !" uttered just in time to prevent you from plunging into a harmless-looking bed of weeds and creepers separating you from the coveted dainties : pleasant even if they had not both been young and happy and full of life and vigour and mutual liking ; pleasanter still to sit down on a broad stone step and divide their plunder under the flickering shade of a pepper tree, with its slender, willow-like leaves and clusters of scarlet berries, eating and chatting the while of all things under the sun, from anecdotes of Highland cotters to nautical gossip and

Herbert Spencer's philosophy. Some men might have found the pleasantness much enhanced by a spice of flirtation with a girl so young, so lovely, and who had, as it were, thrown herself by her own act on their undivided companionship in this luscious, flower-scented, sun-bathed solitude : a girl, too, who according to rumour was neither inexperienced nor averse to such interludes. To young Melville, however, the very fact of Lil's unchaperoned presence with him in that lonely spot was in itself a bar against anything that might savour of flirtation or sentiment, even if such savour would not have seemed a *lache* against the memory of his absent love ; and he might have been a Spaniard, the most chivalrous of the races of men, or Sir Galahad himself, for the grave simplicity with which he accepted a situation which to most untravelled young Englishmen, and any Frenchman, would have seemed too tempting to be wasted ; and treated his young companion with a mingling of fraternal kindness and entire respect which, by convincing Lil that he had taken her rebuff in a good spirit, soon restored her to her old ease and happiness. They might have been brother and sister as they sat there on the cool stone step eating their fruit together, while Lil put the sailor through a catechism as to *how* " wee Janie " talked to the poor people she visited, and confessed with penitence that she and her sisters had always rather scoffed at " that sort of

thing," and stoutly refused to take a class in Mr. Spate's Sunday school : breaking off in the middle to show him how to eat a freshly-gathered fig properly, and not scorch his lips with the white, acrid milk from the base of the fruit. They had forgotten how the time was going, when Liz and Mr. Champion came suddenly into sight, riding up the avenue, where the broad, golden sunbeams now lay like level bars of fire between the empurpled tree-trunks, and called to them to get into their saddles again or it would be night long before they reached home.

Liz was not in a very good temper ; Lil, who knew her so well, could tell that by the sound of her voice ; but she concealed the fact gracefully enough from the others, and only owned to feeling a little tired and headachy after the heat and smell of the *saladero*.

"The machine, however, was *most* interesting," she said, making a great effort to smile and recover herself. Even Robert Champion should not say that his obstinate failure in doing what he should have done had led to any undignified self-betrayal on her part. "I really must try to tell you about it, Mr. Melville, as you would remain behind to take care of lazy Lil." And thereupon, rather to her younger sister's disappointment, she took possession of the sailor, and made him ride beside her, while Lil and Mr. Champion trotted

on in advance through the glory of a gold and crimson sunset fading suddenly into the deep, star-spangled blue of sub-tropical night. Only when they got back into the main streets of the town an accident to Lisbeth's stirrup-leather, which the young officer was not knowing enough in such matters to rectify, obliged Campion to dismount and put it right, allowing the others to resume their old places by one another ; therefore it was Frank, after all, who lifted Lil from the saddle when they reached home ; and her hand that he held in his firm, sailorly clasp as he said in an almost boyish accent of hearty gratitude :

“ Thank you so much for the pleasure you have given me. I can't tell you how much I have enjoyed it.”

Neither of the gentlemen would come in. Indeed they were not pressed to do so, it being dinner-time, a meal at which Mr. Hardy was not partial to impromptu guests ; and Lil followed her sister up-stairs and took off her habit, singing to herself vigorously the while :

“ The Campbells are comin', oho, oho !
The Campbells are comin', oho, oho !
The Campbells are comin' to bonnie Lochleven,
The Campbells are comin', oho, oho ! ”

“ You seem to be in good spirits,” said Liz a little sourly from the inner room, the door of which was open as usual.
“ I suppose you enjoyed yourself at the quinta this afternoon.”

"Awfully," Lil returned with emphasis. "Liz, I do *like* that Mr. Melville. I never saw a man so loyally fond and proud of his own home-people and his native hills. It is quite nice to hear him talk about them."

"And to make other people jealous by listening," said Liz with a laugh. "By the way, how did you get rid of Pedro? I forgot to ask you before; but we expected to find you all together when we got back." Lil came to the door, staring.

"*Pedro Sanchez!* What do you mean? He wasn't there."

"Wasn't he? Well, when Robert Campion and I got down to the bottom of the maize-field we saw that beautiful black horse of his tied to the fence outside old Domenico's ranch. We took it for granted he was somewhere about, and would join company with you. Didn't he?"

"No, indeed, *we* saw nothing of him. Very likely he had only lent his horse to a clerk to ride over with some message to Domenico's," said Lil lightly, and then Loo came to call them to dinner, and she thought no more of the subject—for that time!

CHAPTER VII.

THE MISSES MADRÈRA.

“The father’s name was José—*Don* of course ;
A true Hildago, free from every stain
Of Moor or Hebrew blood ; he traced his source
Through the most Gothic gentlemen of Spain.
A better cavalier ne’er mounted horse,
Or being mounted e’er got down again.”

‘*Don Juan,*’ *Canto I.*

“For gentil men they were of great estat.”—*Chaucer.*

To write about three maiden sisters when all three are young and pretty and covetable to the eye of man, is an easy enough task and pleasant into the bargain. There is always *something* interesting in young and pretty creatures, however devoid of solid and intellectual merit they may be. Otherwise the heroines of the ‘Family Herald,’ and of the sentimental and bread-and-butter school generally, would not exist ; and our housemaids and boarding-school girls would be deprived of half the mental pabulum of their own young lives. Liz, Lil, and Loo Hardy were all very charming in their several ways ; and certainly attracted a large, and possibly

unfair, amount of attention from their neighbours, those of the sterner sex especially. But there were other maiden sisters in Monte San Felipe who had been young and charming too in their day, coveted of men also perhaps ; and still possessing attractions of their own far outweighing to the thoughtful mind any of those ephemeral and external adjuncts, such as rosy lips, bright eyes, dimples, or those slim, rounded contours which are the attribute of youth, and which no art can imitate.

Of these elder virgins, and shining pre-eminently among them, were the *Señoritas Madrèra* ; ladies occupying a high and almost unique position in the social circle of Monte San Felipe, and one recognised equally by foreigners and Orientals in that gay little city, outside which they had never wandered as much as five miles since the days of their infancy.

Yet they were not Monte-San-Felipians, or even Orientals at all ; not in their own estimation at least ; and it was this very circumstance which shed such a peculiar and shining lustre on their status in the little world above-mentioned. They were—as Miss Petrona, the second, would tell you with a reverent sinking of her voice—daughters of the old country, of *Spain* itself ! True, Miss Petrona, as well as her younger sister, Miss Carmela (so called from Our Lady of Mount Carmel !) had been born in Monte San Felipe—nay, in the

very street and the very house they now inhabited. True, with the constancy to place peculiar to cats and Spanish women, they had never been further from the town than the limits before described in the whole course of their lives ; but their mother had been a Castellana of Castille ; their father, though born in Uruguay, where his own father, a veritable hidalgo of Seville, had purchased large estates under the Spanish rule, had, while a mere lad, taken the side of the Government in the struggle for independence, and had retired to Spain with the conquered garrison to which he belonged.

There he remained for some years, during which he married and had two children born to him ; and though he did ultimately return to South America, he was impelled to the step less by his increasing family and limited means, than by the ungrateful and supercilious coldness with which many of the Spanish families, even among his own connections, persisted in treating one who, despite his services to their country, was "only a colonial", an "*Americano*", while he as obstinately declined to consider himself as anything but a Spaniard, and a loyal subject of the Queen under whose flag he had fought, and for whose cause he had sacrificed a princely fortune, and a luxurious home.

He found neither when at the age of forty he returned to the land of his birth. Confiscations, levies, appropriations,

wholesale robbery under one name or another, had swept lands and wealth away, till of all the property his father had left him he found little else but the leasehold of a grim old house in a narrow, out-of-the-way street, a couple of negro servants, too much attached to the family under whose roof they had been born and reared to care for the freedom a self-emancipated country had bestowed on them, and an income very little exceeding the pay he had relinquished when he left the Spanish service.

The Madrèras were, in fact, very poor people, even before the two young daughters came into the world; and Don Manuel was of all men the most helpless to improve upon the state of things into which ill-fortune had brought him in a country like South America. In the first place he was a soldier, "pure and simple", knowing nothing of trade or commerce, but rather holding them in the deepest abhorrence; while during his fifteen years' absence in Spain, Uruguay had become a thriving republic, whose watchword was commerce, and whose sons were one and all making money as fast as possible by trade of every description. Of course he despised them thoroughly. As a "Don" of ancient race what sympathy could he have with this new, vulgar, dollar-grubbing people, what interests in common with theirs? Rather it was a matter of pride in him to stand distinctly apart from

them, to be poor when they were rich, and walk when they drove ; and they, on their side, with that rapid development of changes in all matters, even to thought and feeling, so peculiar to the countries of a new world, had already learnt to regard him with a half-envious respect, as a relic of bygone times, a “*legitimista*”, an “*Español de la antigua España*”; and (as such) superior in some way to their own mushroom fecundity, to the young citizens of that republic which, having successfully destroyed kingships and aristocracies in the present, made haste to kneel down and worship them in the past.

So, after all, Don Manuel found himself more appreciated in Monte San Felipe than in Madrid, and showed his sense of such appreciation in the very way to increase it, namely, by holding himself aloof as much as possible from the world in general, and making no acquaintances except among the few others of the *ancien régime* who, like himself, had made their home in this new country, the officers of the Spanish men-of-war stationed on the coast ; and a few foreigners connected with the different embassies, by all of whom the gallant, dignified old soldier was warmly esteemed.

In good truth both he and his needed whatever comfort they could gain from friendship or any other source ; for, in addition to their poverty, troubles fell heavily on the Madrèra

household. The mother died while Miss Carmelita was still a mere child, worn out and broken by the hardships of a life which had been one long disappointment to her; the eldest daughter, after being engaged with every prospect of happiness to a young French *attaché* of noble family and most amiable character, was robbed of her lover only one week before the nuptials that were to have been by the sudden and ghastly hand of the cholera-fiend then raging in Monte San Felipe; while the only son, instead of being a source of aid and comfort to his family, took to a career of idle dissipation and license, which ended one day in his being brought home with a pistol-bullet in his brain, shot dead in some *café* squabble equally disreputable and puerile.

The shock was too much for Don Manuel. The loss of his wife, and the pathetic bereavement of his favourite daughter, which had stretched her on a bed of sickness from which the physicians gave little hopes of her recovery, had already told heavily on the old soldier; and from the day of his son's funeral he never held up his head again, but drooped and faded so fast that within a few months he too was laid in the grave, leaving his three daughters to fight the world as best they could alone.

It was a hard battle, and there were virtually only two to encounter it, for Doña Isabella, the eldest, had become by

now a hopeless invalid, condemned by an aggravated form of heart disease to what was in fact a prolonged death in life, a terrible and rigorously secluded existence of alternate pain and exhaustion ; but borne with such perfect, uncomplaining sweetness and resignation as made her almost as much an object of worship as of pity and love to the two sisters who watched over and waited on her with a brave and cheerful energy, which won them in their turn the admiration of all who knew them.

How they managed to live no one could tell ; and certainly no one dared to inquire. They were miserably poor ; every cent of their original income having disappeared, partly in their father's lifetime, partly in defraying their brother's debts, a duty which a keen sense of honour compelled them to discharge at any cost to themselves ; and though they still continued to live on in the old house, it was no longer their own, having been sold by them to a grain-merchant, who used the large " sala " and down-stairs premises for offices and storage of his goods, and allowed them to occupy two or three upper rooms at an almost nominal rent, provided they did not call upon him for repairs or renovations. It was a boon to both parties ; for the grain-merchant was thereby exempted from the necessity of employing a caretaker or night-porter to guard the premises ; while the sisters were secured in the

tenancy of their old home : a removal from which would, they felt sure, have half broken their own hearts, and proved fatal to their beloved invalid.

Of course they never married. The man who had wedded Petrona, or *Petronita* (by which childish diminutive she was still at the age of fifty affectionately designated), must also have taken Isabella and Carmelita to wife, a law which of course applied equally to these other two ; and unfortunately it is not every man who cares to take upon himself the undivided care and maintenance of three penniless women, none of whom are either young or beautiful. In the days of their early youth, indeed, it might have been different, and not a few would have been proud to ally themselves with the “*Señoritas de Madrèra*” ; but at that time Don Manuel had been alive, and prompt to resent all such presumptuous aspirations with stern decision. Even Isabella’s betrothal had not received his consent without much and lengthy weighing of pros and cons ; and when trouble and death fell so crushingly on the little household, the Misses Madrèra found the simple, homely work of mutual helpfulness and courage, necessary to enable them to live *at all*, so engrossing that they quietly and at once put all thoughts of love and marriage away from them until the time for any profitable remembrance of such things had gone by for ever.

They took their spinsterhood very cheerfully. Petronita, indeed, a thin, swarthy, very plain little woman, with a long, hooked nose, and a somewhat forbidding severity of expression, was one of those born old maids, imbued almost from the cradle with a certain healthy scorn of mankind (and young and marriageable mankind in particular) which made their neglect of her attractions a very pardonable affliction. She frightened them in fact, and quite as much by her grim looks even in girlhood as by a certain small lash at the end of her tongue, with which, as she grew older, she was apt to scathe, in a precise and ladylike way, both their vices and weaknesses, and those of the women who flattered them.

Even some of her own sex decided that Miss Petronita was too severe to care for any one, or be cared for in return, and yet beneath that acidulated exterior there did in very truth beat the kindest, truest heart that ever warmed a woman's body; and the very acerbity complained of sprang from the one great passion of her life: her love for the brother whose life had been the one blot on the Madrèra escutcheon, and whose death had entailed a whole existence of penury and sorrow upon his sister, but who nevertheless was so canonised in her tender memory that for his sake she was fain to blacken all other men so as by their darkness to pale and whiten his.

With Miss Carmelita, however, it was different. Miss Carmelita, the youngest of the three ; who even in her blossomiest days—God bless her!—could never have been lovely ; yet who, even at thirty-five, an age answering in appearance and repute to fifty in our northern clime, with a skin as yellow as a guinea, a wide mouth shaded by a moustache which many young men might have envied, a nose which went any way but straight, and a long, lean throat like a camel's, retained something in the unquenchable mirth and brilliancy of her large black eyes, the ever pleasant smile showing a double row of white and even teeth, and the trim contours of her tall, well-preserved figure, which was still attractive to the eyes of men as well as womenkind ; and might even at this date have found her a husband had she been desirous of one.

Miss Petronita indeed, with feminine inconsistency of principle, was not averse from boasting of the offers Carmelita had received and refused ; but if these offers, or any one among them, had ever found a kinder response in her own heart Miss Carmelita herself never said. Full of sympathy, warm-hearted and energetic at all times, it was noticed that never did her sympathy, warm-heartedness, and energy come out so strongly as on the occasion of a betrothal or wedding among any of her young friends ; and if her lips sometimes

quivered as she listened to the happy anticipations of some charming young "*novia*"¹, or her bright eyes filled with sudden, uncalled-for tears as she saw a pair of lovers standing hand-in-hand before the priest who was to unite them, she never gave a hint of any personal cause for such emotion ; and with all her sprightliness and sociability no one, even among her intimates, would have dared to ask her for one.

"But Petronita and I *are* married," she would say laughing to some one who told her what a good wife she would have made. "We are married to one another and Isabella. *She* needs at least two husbands to take care of her since the '*pobre* Xavier' left her to us ; and, *Gracias à Dios* for His mercy, no one of the three of us wants a divorce."

This then was the life history of the Miss Madrèras ; but *how* they managed to live at all in the present day, and to live as became ladies of their dignity and position, was another matter, and a mystery even to their friends, who knew that out of the wreck of their fortune there remained to them nothing whatever but the proceeds of the sale of their house.

And yet it was simple enough, terribly simple to those who know on what pitiful crumbs ladies born in luxury and

¹ Bride.

elegance do often manage to live where rough women and costermongers would starve.

The Miss Madrèras only half starved. They pinched and screwed and slaved. They kept no servant but a tiny negro girl, the child of one of their old domestics, and did all but the roughest work themselves. They wore their clothes till they were old, faded, and threadbare. At times they went to bed with the sun in order to save lights. At others they wore out their eyes by sitting up stitching till long past midnight by a solitary candle. When it was winter they huddled together in the smallest of their draughty, fireless rooms, and rolled themselves up in old cloaks and shawls rather than waste a pinch of charcoal in a *brazero* to warm their poor feet, after the fashion of other Spanish ladies; while in summer they were almost smothered by the dry, strong scent of the grain rising into their hot little rooms from the floor below, and pretty well scorched black for want of the Venetians which had long since rotted and dropped away from the gaunt, uncurtained windows. They dined out whenever they were invited, provided the invitation came from persons whose hospitality it would not be derogatory to them to accept, and whom they could repay by gracious little services or courtesy on their own part. On other occasions they could hardly be said to dine at all. Indeed it was said

in jest among their acquaintances that except away from home the Miss Madrèras never did partake of any meal, but lived on air as chameleons are said to do ; a theory which, as they pointed out, was justified by the fact that the Madrèra establishment comprised neither cook, kitchen, nor dining-room, and that no one had ever yet succeeded in surprising the sisters at anything in the shape of a repast.

This was a mistake, however, for in the rear of the house was a small, nearly dark apartment, lighted only by a doorway without even a door to it, floored with rough bricks, and containing a heap of charcoal and sticks in one corner, a few pots and pans in another, a *brazero*, a large washing-tub, and a couple of rude, unplanned shelves displaying the household crockery : which chamber, originally intended for a lumber-room or woodshed, was at once the Miss Madrèras' kitchen, laundry, and china-closet ; and the scene of such triumphs of cookery in the way of strong "*caldo*"—(beef-tea with the fat left floating on the top)—savoury "*tortillas*" and fricassees of fish flavoured with garlic or raisins for the tempting of poor Isabella's feeble appetite as only the genius of Miss Petronita could have achieved over a three-legged iron pot with a handful of charcoal in it.

For herself and Carmelita far more meagre diet sufficed ; though Isabella herself had never yet been permitted to

suspect the difference, or to witness the meals of which (under the plea of its being bad to crowd a sick-room) her sisters always partook apart from her. A cup of black coffee sweetened with the coarsest brown sugar, and a crust of bread formed their breakfast: a mess of boiled "*jiléos*", a very common kind of macaroni largely manufactured in Monte San Felipe; or now and then a dish of "*puchero*", marrow-bones with a few fragments of meat and gristle attached to them and boiled in rice, their dinner, washed down with plain water, for even "*carlon*", the common red wine of the country, was beyond their means; while for supper a biscuit or a twist of "*pan-con-grasa*", a kind of sweet Spanish bread made in the shape of rings and cornucopias, munched between sips of scalding "*maté*", that well-loved South American substitute for tea, more than satisfied the sisters' modest requirements, and was partaken of, like their other meals, with an amount of cheery content and thankfulness which it might have done good to the souls of some *gourmets* to witness.

They were very devout. They heard Mass every morning of their lives before breakfast, crossed themselves piously before every meal and at every striking of the clock, repeated together an Ave Maria and De Profundis for the souls of the dead every night, and confessed their few sins on each

alternate Saturday with quiet, unaffected piety and regularity. They even managed to give alms to the poor, and to pay for annual masses to be said for the repose of their father and mother, their brother and Xavier d'Arifat, the betrothed of Isabella ; but they were also very gay, danced and gossiped and played bezique and écarté with equal zest and spirit, were always full of conversation, and went out into society more than any ladies in the place.

Nor did they make at all a shabby appearance there ; though indeed it would not have lowered them in the estimation of their neighbours had they done so ; wealth and its outward appearances being by no means the social test in Spanish countries that they are in our own beloved little island. If the dresses they wore were old and well-known, if they had been turned and mended and refashioned a hundred times, they were always of the finest materials and arranged in the latest "mode". If the lace mantillas which covered their stately heads had been darned and redarned and embroidered over by Miss Carmelita's skilful fingers till little of the original material remained, that little was of the costliest Brussels or Maltese, a relic of their mother's wedding *trousseau*, and such as was hardly to be purchased in the best shops in Monte San Felipe ; while the few ornaments they possessed, cumbrous and antiquated as they might be,

were heirlooms too, remnants of family grandeur which many of their friends would have given much vulgar but honestly earned money to possess.

They were *ladies*, in fact, poor, ugly, quaint and somewhat fantastic ; but ladies, both by birth, culture, and refinement ; and as such they were looked up to and respected by a community very little given to respecting anything ; and to such a degree that not to be known by the Miss Madrèras was to argue some social or moral inferiority in yourself sufficiently marked to stamp you as best unknown by the better class of people altogether.

And the curious thing was, that this feeling did not only hold good with the natives, as to whose origin and character they might be supposed to be well informed, but to the foreign population of Monte San Felipe ; and especially to the French and English section of it, in whose houses the Miss Madrèras were as well known and honoured guests as in the "*salas*" of the highest of the "*señoras del país*."

It was this fact which formed such a peculiar distinction between them and the generality of their countrymen ; and set them, as it were, apart from the latter in a way which it needs to be a woman of that narrowest, most exclusive, foreigner-hating and heretic-fearing people to appreciate ; yet it was easily explained ; for the mother of "*el pobre*

Xavier" had been an Englishwoman ; and the wife of the English Consul of his day, with whom he was very intimate, and to whom he had introduced the three sisters, had taken such a fancy to them that, despite Don Manuel's stiffness and hauteur, and all the difficulties and restrictions which his Spanish pride and poverty tried to throw in the way of an intimacy between them, she had persisted in having them at her house at all times and seasons, mothering and making much of them ; and in the time of Xavier's death and their subsequent losses and afflictions had so identified herself with them by the warmth of her womanly tenderness and sympathy, that when one fine day her husband was knighted in recognition of some diplomatic service he had performed, and promoted to Rio Janeiro, the Misses Madrèra mourned for Lady Sherrington as for a second mother ; and not only gratefully accepted her introduction to their successors at the Consulate, where the young ladies had so long been at home, but found a constant pleasure in endeavouring by every graceful courtesy and attention in their power to repay to these latter, and indeed to any newly-arrived English family (those within a certain pale, *bien entendu*), the kindness they had received from their well-loved patroness, daughter of a barbarous and heretic island though she were.

CHAPTER VIII.

A VISIT OF CEREMONY.

“Strut insolent in your wealth, money changes not birth.”

“He lives on little well upon whose humble board his father's salt-cellar gleams.”—*Horace*.

“Say, she has passed through the fire,

Heated seven times red,

Burden of vain desire, hope that was last to expire

Say she is living—not dead.”—*A. Proctor*.

“Oh wad some God the giftie gie us,

To see oursel's as ithers see us !”—*Burns*.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon—the afternoon of that same day which Lil Hardy was spending so agreeably at the Quinta Disgraciada ; and Miss Petronita and Carmelita were just dressed for the day.

By this, I do not of course mean that the day was only just beginning for those two ladies ; or that they had been spending the early part of it in prolonged siestas. On the contrary, they had been up since five, and with the exception of a brief period for their devotions, and a much briefer one for their frugal breakfast and dinner, had been hard at work

with the needle ever since, without any such luxury as a siesta at all. These labours, however, had been performed, according to Spanish custom, in a comfortable, if unalluring costume, consisting only of a loose calico wrapper, clean indeed, but long since washed out of all colour, drawn in with a string at the waist, and worn over a single undergarment in conjunction with easy slippers, no stockings, and hair screwed up tightly in a little knot on the top of the head, so as to leave face and throat as cool as possible.

Miss Petronita had added to her coiffure an old black silk handkerchief tied round her head, as an aid towards warding off incipient toothache; but the addition could hardly be considered as an improvement, or as showing any coquettish effect. Indeed, I am prepared to admit that the *toute ensemble* of this feminine deshabille, was the reverse of seductive in every respect; and, that if set up against the severely neat propriety of attire proper to an English spinster in the position of the Miss Madrèras, it could not have held a farthing candle to the latter.

In the first place, however, this carelessly scanty attire, however shocking in the description, or to a stranger's eyes, is never *meant* to be visible to the latter, or any other than the servants and similarly clad inmates of an Oriental lady's apartments, to whom it is as much a matter of course, as the

dress-gown sacred to our own bed-rooms ; morning calls, or early social intrusions of any sort, being more opposed to Spanish etiquette than any amount of *deshabille* in the privacy of their matutinal hours ; and secondly, when viewed apart from the natural colouring of our insular and inherited prejudices, there is surely something in the conception of dress by the Spanish-American mind, namely, that when not meant to be seen by the outer world, it is a matter to be regulated simply and solely by comfort—not elegance ; and that to wear a single unnecessary article of clothing, more especially such warm and constraining articles as stockings and stays, in a climate where the wearing of nothing at all would be perfectly practicable, is an act of folly worthy only of barbarians born in a land where the sun never shines, and siestas are unknown.

By five o'clock, however, the case was quite altered. People might drop in then at any moment. Comfort must give way to *convenances*. Besides, it was getting cooler ; the sun, which all day long had been beating like a red-hot flail on the unshuttered windows of the Madrèras' apartments, had slipped away behind the twin towers of the Cathedral, which it seemed to fuse in a haze of molten gold. The grain-merchant and his clerks were shutting up their offices for the day. The sound of their feet tramping about on the

big grey paving-stones, tufted here and there with grass, of the patio below was audible above, mingled with the faint smell of their cigars, buffetting that of coriander and hemp-seed, which had weighed heavily on the hot, breathless air during the earlier hours of the day. Even Miss Petronita's sole pet, a one-eyed hen with a broken leg, which she had rescued from a boy who was stoning it, and brought home to nurse, had come out from its basket and was pecketting about on the rotten old wooden gallery on which its mistress's rooms opened, pausing now and then to contemplate the men in the patio below through one of the numerous holes in the flooring of the crazy and perilous structure; and its mistress herself was standing at the door of her apartment smiling at it in all the glory of her afternoon array—a black *glacé* silk, somewhat thin of texture from many years of good service, but gay with lace and bugles, and fitted like a glove to her now stiffly corsetted figure; long black lace mittens, silk stockings and high-heeled shoes embroidered (by herself) with bugles to match her gown, a magnificent gold brooch set with four huge carbuncles, and ear-rings at least three inches long of the same, weighing down the thin lobes of her ears till the tips of them rested on her shoulders.

Equally gorgeous was Miss Carmelita, though in a lighter and more girlish style, as befitted her comparative juvenility,

wearing a flowered *barège*, the flowers pansies of their natural size and hue on a fawn-coloured ground ; and also much adorned with ruffings of lace about her rather thin and yellow throat ; while her hair was quite a marvel to behold, drawn back from the brow in frizzly puffs, with a charming *acroche-cœur* of no miniature size pasted coquettishly on either temple ; and at the back a very cornucopia of rolls, bows, and plaits, culminating in a tall, mother-o'-pearl comb studded with silver stars ; a work of art really deserving a prize in a hair-dressing competition, and quite extinguishing the more modest, if equally raven-hued, erection on Miss Petronita's head ; while though in mittens, stockings and shoes, the sisters matched each other to a thread, their fans were different, to match the owners' gowns—Petronita's being of black wood with red roses painted on it, and Carmelita's of purple silk with mother-o'-pearl sticks.

"Petronita," said the latter as, her sister having put the last touch to her structure of back hair, she rose up slowly from before the glass, "I have had a feeling all day that we should have visitors this afternoon. We ought to have been dressed before."

"That is certain, for it is very late ; but we were getting on so nicely with that cradle-quilt, I did not like to leave off before," answered the elder sister. "Besides, if Madame de

Bouilly should call, she will be pleased to hear so much of it is done. When is the little one expected, Carmelita ?”

“In April, the latter part ; but of course Madame wants to have it in good time beforehand ; and it seems the dear Amelie is a little nervous.”

“Ah, that is the way with these young things, they are so often out in their calculations when it comes to the end,” said Miss Petronita sharply, “and yet *months* before they will tell you to a day. Bah !”

“But Amelie is so *very* young ; and after all one must learn these things by experience,” said Miss Carmelita soothingly, and without any affectation of the hesitation or blushes which the discussion of so tender a subject might have rendered necessary to an English spinster even of her age.

“Hush !” she added in the same breath and lifting her finger for silence. “Is not that some one on the stairs ?”

“Some street child only, I think. Yes, do you not hear the wicked little feet clattering down again ? and there is a shower of stones in the patio ! It is too bad of them to make a playground of our entrance as soon as office hours are over. I have a good mind to keep the front-door closed, and let Dolores answer it when there is a knock ; but the lazy little

thing is so fond of going to sleep, ten to one she would not hear it if we were out; and besides, one does not like her to leave Isabella then."

"All young animals are fond of sleep: they need it to grow," said Miss Carmelita, ever kind; "but, sister, Isabella has still got her class. Is it not time she should leave off?"

"*Carramba!* Yes; time and more than time. What a sin of me to forget her! She will be dead," and Miss Petronita passed hurriedly into the *sala* which adjoined the bed-room where they were standing.

This sala was the sisters' one sitting-room, and was, therefore, so highly prized by them that they hardly ever sat in it. It was not the original one belonging to the house, that being used for a store, but the bed-room adjoining it, and was therefore not a very cheerful apartment, having no window to the street, nor any other lighting than the glass door opening like all the others into the long gallery overhanging the patio; but it was *their* sala, and the furniture, meagre and ugly as it was, was the residue of that which had come down to them from their parents and grandparents, and had therefore a lustre in their eyes which gave it a dignity and value quite above any other people's belongings. The carpet for instance, though so worn, faded, and patched that it had lost all semblance of

ever having had any pattern or colour in it, and more resembled an old hearth-cloth than anything else, was swept by the fair hands of Miss Carmelita herself from a vague idea of saving "the pile" (?) from the rougher attacks of the little negro girl; while the huge, uncomfortable sofa, whose carved and knobby back inflicted an acute martyrdom on those who were foolish enough to lean against it, and the six chairs with seats in faded embroidery, once the work of Miss Petronita, ranged at regular intervals round the wall, were one and all encased in nightgown-looking bags of shrunken, washed-out holland, which served the double purpose of protecting them from the onslaught of the jovial sun, and suggesting unhinted-at costliness of rosewood and tapestry beneath. There were three doors to the room, the outer one afore-mentioned and two others facing each other, and opening, the one into Isabella's chamber, the other into that tenanted by the other two sisters. Over the latter of these hung the portrait of a saint too blackened with age and intersected with cracks to be recognisable; while above the sofa of state were two other likenesses, of Don Manuel Madrèra and his wife, executed in oil by some artist who appeared to have derived all his conceptions of the human face and form divine from a lengthened and hideous nightmare of cheap photography and the figure-heads of Dutch merchant-men;

but which the Misses Madrèra regarded with pious reverence as works of art unsurpassable for beauty and grace, and would not have exchanged for a Raffaele or a Correggio. The Señora had been taken in a low-necked black satin gown with a large pink rose, evidently cut out of paper, in her hand ; while the Don was in full uniform, his breast covered with medals and crosses, and one wooden arm stretched out with the fingers pointing downward as if to draw attention to the chief pride of his daughters' hearts,—half-a-dozen books arranged in a formal pattern on a large round table in the corner of the room, and comprising among them a photograph album, 'Don Quixote', in two volumes, an atlas with the department in France which had given birth to "*el pobre Xavier*" marked out in red ink by the girl he loved so many years ago, the 'Imitation' in Spanish, an odd volume of 'La Biographie Universelle,' a Tasso in tarnished white and gold morocco, and '*Las Aventuras Romanticas de Don Luis Pereira en su Viage Circa Del Mundo*,' by some Spanish novelist unknown to fame outside his own country. What of that, however? It was a *book* ; part of the Miss Madrèras' library, and a library larger perhaps than that owned by three out of four Oriental ladies, comprising works in several languages, works they had *read* ;—and which by their mute presence in the otherwise bare and unadorned

room, whose ghastly ugliness would have done discredit to the shabbiest lodging-house parlour in London, bore testimony even now to the solid ground for that reputation for culture and learning which had always appertained to their fair owners; and which, in conjunction with their intimacy with foreigners, would (but for their universal popularity) have stamped them as being almost dangerously strong-minded and liberal.

As the sisters entered this apartment a low murmur of voices reached them through the closed door of the invalid's room, and Miss Carmelita said softly :

“It is the children repeating their litany.”

“True, but they should have finished by now. I must hurry them,” and tapping at the door, Petronita opened it gently and asked :

“My sister, is it not time for thy class to have done? Thou wilt be so fatigued, and it has gone five.”

“*Gracias, mi Petronita*, has it truly? I had forgotten the time, but they are going now,” answered a voice very sweet, but low and feeble; and almost immediately there came out two little brown-skinned, velvety-eyed Spanish girls from eight to ten, and a small negress about a year their senior, who saluted the *Señoritas* in passing with a quaint mixture of childish bashfulness and Spanish courtesy, and departed,

the former down a broad flight of stone stairs leading from the gallery to the entry below; the latter, with a sharp enjoiner from Miss Petronita to put the kettle on for *maté*, to the improvised kitchen at the back of the house.

These were Isabella's pupils. Helpless as the poor sufferer was, both from the exhausting pains she suffered from, and a nervous trembling in her hands which prevented her from attempting any other work than a little coarse knitting or mending at rare intervals, she was as rigorous with herself as any task-master with an idle servant. Unable to bear much conversation, or even at times the presence of others in the room with her, she passed much of her days in perfect solitude, engaged in almost continual prayer and meditation, praises and thanksgivings to the God who, while imposing on her this lingering death in life which had already endured for more than twenty years, had left her spirit free to commune with Him, and surrounded her with the love and charity of her fellow-creatures: intercessions for the living and the dead, for the sick, the suffering and the sinful, the great, turbid, passionate, erring world, the echoes of whose heart-pulse rose up to her quiet room only in a faint, far-away murmur like the hum of a distant hive. The early part of the afternoon was her best time. Then she was seldom in much suffering; and then accordingly it was her

great delight to have in either the little negress, whom she taught to read and write and say her catechism, or one or two little girls from some neighbouring "*conventillo*"¹ to be prepared by her for their first Communion or Confirmation: a work so precious to her that even when followed, as it occasionally was, by hours of faintness and palpitation, her sisters never had the heart to oppose her in it.

On this afternoon the echoes of the little pupils' feet had hardly ceased to be audible down the steep and resonant stairway, whose steps broken and hollowed out by long years of use did not present the safest foothold, when a much heavier tread, accompanied by a rustling of silk and no little panting and blowing, announced some fresh arrival, and was followed by the sound of hands clapped smartly together and the salutation "*Ave Maria!*" uttered in a loud voice, and showing that the visitor was already in the corridor.

"*Adelante!*"² cried Miss Petronita in answer, adding in a hasty aside to her sister, "It is *las de Sanchez*." And the two hurried forward, meeting on the threshold of their apartment an immensely stout, elderly woman, attired in costly mourning, and accompanied by a younger one, both of whom they kissed on either cheek and welcomed with all the effusive graciousness and cordiality so distinctive of Spanish

¹ Courts where the poor live.

² "Forward!"

hospitality, and which a foreigner is apt to find almost embarrassingly flattering until he discovers that it is bestowed with equal readiness on a person coming to inquire after the character of a cook as on a dear and intimate friend.

"But how good it is of you, dear Señora, to come to visit us when it is so long since we have been to you," said Miss Petronita, after the visitors had been seated with much formality on the sofa of state, and due inquiries had been made for Don Tomas Sanchez and Don Pedro on the one side, and for Doña Isabella on the other; "and to climb these stairs too which are so steep for you!"

"Ah, you mean I am so stout for them," said the Señora with a short, guttural laugh; "but Pepa here is always telling me I should get thinner if I took more exercise; so perhaps clambering up your stairs once is about as good for me as the six journeys to and from the Matriz every day which she would like me to perform. Eh, Pepa, is it not so? But the young ones are getting so '*dévota*' now (when they are not just the contrary) that there is no keeping pace with them."

"Mama means that I should like her to go once every day," explains Pepa, who was short, thin, and swarthy, and in no way resembling her handsome brother, Lil Hardy's

“Pedrito.” “And, mama, it is no use talking that way to the Miss Madrèras, for *they* go daily also.”

“But they have so many sins to make acts of penitence for,” said Miss Petronita modestly, “and besides,” with an affectionate glance at Carmelita, “if *my* young thing goes I must go too to take care of her.”

“Ah, I dare say there are some people who would not mind running away with Carmela even now,” observed the Señora, answering the allusion in what she intended to be a complimentary manner; though the coarseness of the failure thereof almost sent a shiver through the gracious sisters. “And you would miss her abominably. Our house is never so cheerful as when she is in it; but indeed what with Pepa always at church, and Mariquita at school, and Mäura with her babies, and even Pedrito running after heretic English-women, I might as well be a nun, I see so little of any one at home; and with my fatness, what a barbarity to expect me to gad about after society like some people do: *las de* Guzman and Herrera, for instance! *Dios!* but they are for ever in the street, those women! How they do it I can’t imagine; but I suppose it is to pick up news for their rogues of husbands to make bad use of in public affairs.”

“Take care, mama! The Miss Madrèras are great friends of the Guzmans,” said Pepa warningly. Her mother

laughed. "Ah, ah! Every one is aware that the Miss Madrèras are too amiable to be unfriendly to anybody. One must of course be Christian if one wants to be saved; but to suppose that she or any person of decency could approve of that Guzman woman who makes use of her '*blanco*' connections to worm out political secrets for the benefit of her turn-coat of a husband—*Carramba!* I would not insult her so much."

"Only that, as the Señora doubtless remembers, we two poor women have no politics—none at all: we do not even understand them," said Miss Petronita, spreading out her lean hands deprecatingly. The Señora laughed again with evident derision in her mirth. To her the idea of any Oriental woman *not* being keenly interested in one or other of the warring political parties was too absurd to be regarded seriously; though indeed it was a relic of their father's contempt as a Spanish subject for the internal divisions of this mushroom republic that his daughters had always affected to have no opinions respecting the latter, and had signalised themselves by being the only ladies of any position in Monte San Felipe who visited with perfect impartiality at the houses of both parties, and had equally cordial relations with each. In the mean while, however, Pepa Sanchez had turned to Carmelita, and sinking her voice to a rather low tone, observed:

“Of course when mama was speaking of Englishwomen just now she referred to Lila Hardy. Is it not a pity she has such a strong dislike to her? for Pedro is far too enamoured to be held back now, and he is quite independent of papa. If he is determined to marry her he will do so.”

“But has he spoken yet? Are they engaged?” asked Miss Carmelita, all in a twitter of eagerness at the first word of a love affair. Pepa Sanchez shook her head.

“We hardly know ourselves. The opposition at home has made him reserved even to me; and then we do not see much of him. Like all men, he is always at the *cafés*; that is to say, when he is not *there*.”

“At the Hardys’?”

“Yes; do you not often meet him there? We know you are intimate with the Señoritas Hardy; and mama thinks so much of your opinion and Miss Petronita’s. Perhaps if you could say something good of them she might soften.”

“You would be pleased with it then for yourself?”

“I would not choose it; but—it is true, I like la Lilita. She is ‘*muy amabile*,’¹ and I am sure there is much good in her. Besides, Pedro is our only brother, and it is not well to have quarrels in a family. Yesterday when Mäura said something of her, he answered quite roughly, ‘Silence! You

¹ Very amiable.

will have her for a sister, that is certain.' Mäura said, 'But, Pedro, she is a heretic,' and he laughed and replied, 'Now, perhaps; but when she is my wife she will be as good a Catholic as you. Even at the present hour she often goes to the Matriz.' And it is true. So many times I have seen her there, and always so serious and devout. One who only saw her at other times would not know her. Of course it would be a great thing for her to marry Pedrito: greater than she could hope for, perhaps; for the Señor Hardy—what is he in his own country? Perhaps you know? No great thing, one imagines; and even of the other sisters I say nothing. They have no sympathy for me; but la Lilita herself has a beauty, an air— And then what a grand work to make a Catholic of her!"

"Ah! so Pepa is talking of this little English girl to you," broke in the Señora Sanchez in her thick, guttural tones. "I too have been speaking to your sister on the subject, disagreeable a one as it is to me; and she assures me that the family is well received at the *Consulado Ingles*. Ah! well, it is a bitter drug that one's own son, an only son too, should allow himself to be entrapped and married by a girl sprung from these barbarous and heathenish English; for, convert her or not, she can never be equal to a woman of our own Christian and civilised race—(*Ay de mi!* could she not have

fallen in love with some one else?)—but if she is of good conduct and character, I suppose I shall have to resign myself; and it is for that reason I speak to you. I said to myself, ‘The Señoritas Madrèras go amongst these English. They know everybody; and if they can guarantee that this young person will be worthy of the position—’ *Vamos!* let us be frank. I have heard rumours that she is a flirt; and if so——”

“Ah! but no, Señora, it is not the truth,” cried the good Carmelita eagerly, for Lil was a favourite of hers, and in any case it was not in the spinster’s nature to speak ill of those who were young and already hardly judged.

“She is admired. Why not? When a girl is so pretty it is but natural: as also that she should like it; but there is no wickedness in la Lilita. It is a disposition altogether ‘*simpatica*’ and intellectual, and she has a good heart. If she gives it to Don Pedro he may trust in it.”

‘But it is true that she has been talked about with others—no?’ said the Señora suspiciously. “And with these English who go about alone everywhere, and even left to sit with their ‘*novios*’ when affianced without any duenna in the room to watch over them, one cannot be too careful. Let me tell you Pedrito is desperately jealous. He is a madman

—a tiger when enraged. Now, if she were to play with him——”

“Ah; but she would not. I know her. If her heart is his you will never hear that she looks at another man,” cried Miss Carmelita; while her sister put in in a cooler and more dogmatic tone:

“See you, my dear Señora, one must not judge the English by ourselves. These girls have no mother; and the Señor Hardy—— Well, it is true we do not like him much. There is a want of frankness about his antecedents; but he is well received; and of his wife no one could say ill. She——,” dropping her voice reverentially, while Miss Carmelita bent her head at the same moment, “was even a friend of our dear Lady Sherrington; and as you well know, one cannot say more! Truly her death has left the girls far too much to themselves; and we may own without being unchristian that in that the father is to blame; but we have seen much of la Lilita, and as even our Isabella will tell you—(ah! Pepa, you wish to go in and see her now? but remember she must not talk for more than a few minutes)—the child is of a nature very innocent and generous. Since Don Pedro has won her you need not afflict yourself. He may rest secure.”

“*Ave Maria!*” cried a sharp, clear young voice outside, and almost before either sister could utter the customary

“*Adelante!*” the doorway was darkened by a fresh visitor, and there entered a very young lady, very elaborately attired, and wearing an expression of saucy satisfaction on her small, fair face, which for one brief moment was certainly not reflected on those of her hostesses.

CHAPTER IX.

LOUIE MAKES MISCHIEF.

“I will speak daggers to her.”—‘*Hamlet*.’

“The lips of a fool intermeddle with strife : and his mouth provoketh quarrels.”—‘*Proverbs*.’

“The quarrel is a very pretty quarrel as it stands ; we should only spoil it by trying to explain it.”—‘*The Rivals*.’

“How do you do, how do you do?” said little Loo Hardy, speaking English for the benefit of the Misses Madrèra, who, after twenty years’ contact with that barbarous language, had not only attained to the pitch of understanding (I will not say *speaking*) it, but that far more difficult one to a Spaniard of owning to doing so. We have all *some* small inch of ground on which our dignity takes its stand. Even the bishop of Rum-ti-foo, it may be remembered, thought it unseemly to show his capability to “stand, his leg supported in his hand ;” and if the Marquis of Salisbury could chop down a tree, we doubt if he would boast of the accomplishment. In like manner Orientals are not ambitious of

betraying a familiarity with the uncouth inflexions of the English tongue.

“How do you do, Señora?” she added in Spanish, bestowing an impertinent little nod, and the tips of three fingers cased in long, light blue gloves, upon the dowager present, who, as the wife of one of the richest men in Monte San Felipe, an ex-minister, and a reigning favourite of the present Government, was accustomed to be approached with an amount of respect which made Loo’s nonchalant greeting equally appalling and offensive to her.

“Well, I thank you, Señorita,” she replied with grimly stertorous formality, and, desirous of preventing any further freedoms from the intruder, rose to depart without further delay. She was prevented from doing so, however, by the appearance at that moment of the little black servant-girl, glorious to behold in her best afternoon frock, fashioned by Miss Petronita’s own skilful fingers out of a remnant of thin scarlet material, her sleeves short so as to show her plump, ebony arms, her wool well greased and plaited into a hundred minute tails about an inch and a half long, and her round black face gleaming dimly through the clouds of fragrant steam proceeding from the *maté* bowl, a gourd curiously carven, coloured black and set in silver, which she carried in both hands and presented to her mistress, after having first

sucked and then blown through the *bombilla*,¹ through which the much-loved tea of Paraguay is imbibed.

Willing or unwilling, the Señora had nothing for it but to sit down again. There is no offence in rejecting offers of afternoon tea in this country ; but to refuse to partake of *maté* in an Uruguayan house, or at least of the one sip necessary for politeness in its passage from the hostess to each guest in succession, would be a breach of courtesy almost equal to refusing your hand to a friend ; and to be rude to the Misses Madrèra for the sake of a mere chit of a thing like this little Hardy girl was not what even the Señora desired ; but Miss Petronita's keen eye saw the cloud gathering on her brow, and she would gladly have foregone the obligation of passing the *maté* bowl to her offended guest, after her own preliminary suck at it, if so be she might have speeded her departure instead, and thereby avoided the risk to Lil's future involved in any further *contre-temps*.

It was not that she was as anxious to see her young friends married as was Miss Carmelita. On the contrary, she thought they were much better off as they were. Women ought, she thought, to be strong enough to hold both their lives and their happiness in their own hands, instead of trusting them to the risky ones of men ; and if they were not there were

¹ A silver tube terminating at one end in a perforated bulb.

always convents for them to retire to. Besides, in this case she did not happen to admire Pedro Sanchez, and positively disliked his mamma, whose airs of coarse patronage and superiority grated the more on her own aristocratic sensibilities from the fact that the Señora's mother was well known to have been her husband's cook before he raised her to the dignity of a spouse, and a lady whose immediate ancestors had certainly been full-blooded specimens of the Ethiopian race.

With all this, however, it could not be denied that a marriage with young Sanchez would, in a worldly sense, be an extremely good thing for any fortuneless girl; and if it were true that Lil Hardy liked him, and that matters were tacitly settled between them, Miss Petronita was too benevolent not to lend her aid towards smoothing the girl's way with her prospective mother-in-law; or to feel really grieved when an unkind thought thwarted that purpose by sending into the Señora's presence Loo Hardy; pert, flippant Loo, whose rampant tomboyism disgusted her own delicate sense of feminine propriety at every word, and whose childish dislike to the whole Sanchez family (Pedro only excepted) was freely vaunted by the young lady herself.

Loo, on the other hand, was in high spirits. Never did she feel herself in "stronger form" (to quote her own expression) than when the departure of her sisters for a whole afternoon

left her free to dress herself in her best, and sally forth to shop or to pay calls on her own account. In the first place there was the necessity of showing her spirit by refusing to mope at home when thus heartlessly abandoned by her elders in the pursuit of their own enjoyment; and secondly, when she went out with them Liz always directed her choice of dress, or at any rate checked all exuberances and eccentricities in it which did not happen to meet her approval; while Louie's special delight, on the contrary, was to put on whatever would attract as much notice to herself as possible; she having the idea, not uncommon among older but equally uneducated members of her sex, that observation and admiration mean the same thing, and that the broadest stare of wonder or disapprobation is preferable to the slight of being passed by without the comment of a glance. Finally, as she was pretty certain to do or say something whilst out on these independent excursions which got her into trouble with the home authorities as soon as it was discovered, there was always the additional and delightful sense of risk involved in, and considerably adding to, her enjoyment.

On the present occasion she had attired herself in a very pale blue *barège* made over a low under boddice, with sleeves to the elbow, and a skirt adorned with as many flouncings and puffings as it would hold, long blue kid gloves, bronze

shoes with cut-steel buckles ; and her fair hair plaited in a thick tail for half its length and then tied with a blue ribbon and falling in a crinkly cascade over the huge bow of the sash which Juana had at her request tightly girded round her slim waist. To crown all, she had neatly stuffed a couple of pocket-handkerchiefs into the bodice of her dress, so as to lend it a more womanly contour than unassisted nature might have allowed it to assume ; had powdered her fair little face in an absurdly unnecessary manner ; and had borrowed Lil's only gold necklace, which, being much too large for her very slender throat, hung down sufficiently low over her chest to make a very noticeable ornament. Yet with all this magnificence, Louie had abstained from any special imprudence, and had contented herself with only parading once up and down the length of Calle 25de Mayo, the Regent Street of Monte San Felipe, nodding to about thirty acquaintances, and stopping to speak to half-a-dozen ; and had wound up by buying an ounce of camphorated chalk at the English chemist's (a favourite resort for loungers of the male sex), and carrying off with her from there a young midshipman, whom she employed to convey it for her as far as the Misses Madrèra's door, where she dismissed him with a smiling "*Gracias muchissimas*," and "*Adios!*" gracious and grown-up, enough to fire his boyish blood. She felt quite virtuous as

her little feet tripped lightly up the steep and broken stairs leading to the spinsters' dwelling-room; for, as she said to herself with some pride, she had done nothing, positively *nothing* to-day, that one's great-grandmother could object to, and had not even allowed herself to go to the corner of the street in which were situated the English Club and the Hotel Oriental; though perhaps this excess of virtue was not so much owing to original grace as to an unpleasant reminiscence of having once encountered her father whilst she was dawdling in the vicinity of these haunts of men, and of having been straightway ordered off home with a sharper and more scathing rebuke than Mr. Hardy often troubled himself to bestow on his daughters.

To-day an archangel could not have found anything to scold her about, unless indeed the purchase of that harmless dentifrice, camphorated chalk, be a sin; and she was therefore in the best of tempers with herself, when just as she gained the corridor on which the Madrèras' modest sala opened, she caught the sound of Doña Sanchez' grumbling, guttural tones saying something to which Miss Petronita's shriller accents made answer in a voice of pleading: something in which the names of both Lil and Pedro were audible. The quick wits of the Elf needed nothing more. She jumped to the conclusion on the instant that the surly old woman who had

never yet deigned to call on them, and had only once invited them to a party at her house, when she had scowled at them disapprovingly all the while, was saying something against her sister and connected with Pedro's courtship, and straightway her spirit rose to the occasion, and she marched into the room with head erect and sparkling eyes in the very mood for a battle.

The kindly maiden sisters saw these signs, and recognised them with a sinking heart; but there was no help forthcoming, and while Petrona was passing the *maté* bowl with all due formalities to the Señora, Miss Carmelita tried to open the conversation pleasantly by complimenting their younger visitor on her rosy cheeks, and patting them playfully with the tips of her thin, yellowish fingers. Louie smiled with much affability.

"Roses? Have I? Why, Liz always says I am so sallow; but it is hot enough out of doors to make any one red, and I have been walking quite fast. That tiresome child, little Maxwell; one of the Flagship middies, you know" (he was at least three years Louie's senior), "met me and *would* want to escort me home; so I was quite glad to shake him off by running in here."

"That was prudent," said Miss Petronita approvingly. The Señora was sucking down the scalding *maté* in as big

gulps as though her inside were made of cast-iron, while the little negress stood like a black statue in dutiful attendance behind her chair, and the good spinster thought the opening a favourable one. "I am glad you are so wise, Luisita, for though, of course, you are only a child now, you will be a woman some day; and it is never well to let men attach themselves to you when you are alone. Lilita doubtless will have taught you that. She too knows how these things should be."

"Does she? I'm not so sure of that," said Louie laughing. "But little Maxwell *isn't* a man! If he had been, it would have made all the difference. I like men very much; and so does Lil, for that matter; and I don't see why we shouldn't walk with them when we are alone, just as much as when we are with other women. They can't eat us. I believe it's only the people that nobody wants to walk with that really disapprove of it."

The Señora took the *bombilla* out of her mouth and passed it to the black girl for transmission to Miss Carmelita, her somewhat goggle eyes with their clouded whites, so significant of the strain of dark blood in her, fixed ominously on Loo the while.

"You are wrong, Señorita," she said hoarsely. "These may be the ideas and customs of English young ladies; but,

gracias à Dios! Oriental girls—my Pepa, for instance—would rather die than do such a thing.”

“Let’s hope then no one has tempted Pepa to expire by making the request,” retorted the Elf pertly. “Also, she never goes anywhere but to church, does she? and men are not much lovers of church except when there is a pretty girl inside it. I have heard them say so themselves, yes, a hundred times,” finished up the saucy girl with a mischievous toss of her head, for which even the tender-hearted Miss Carmelita could have found it in her to box her ears; while Miss Petrona gave a certain sharp jerk to her shoulders which her sister well understood to imply that *she* gave up the affair, and would interest herself no further in it. The Señora rose for the second time; that is to say, she began to do so, rising in people of her size not being a performance to be achieved with acrobatic celerity; and at the same moment the door into Miss Isabella’s apartment opened, and Pepa Sanchez made her appearance again among the party. The sight of little Loo Hardy was a surprise to her, and being of course unaware of what had passed, she greeted the Elf with gracious cordiality, and enquired after her sisters, Lil in particular, with all the more effusion that after an interview with the saintly-minded sufferer within she felt with even greater fervour than usual that to venture a brother for such

a rich harvest of souls as the three Hardy girls (for why should not Lil, "being converted, convert her brethren"?) was well worth any effort on her part. Louie answered her with smiling familiarity.

"My sisters? Quite well—thanks, and much better off than I am to-day: Lil at any rate. The lucky girl has gone out for a long delightful ride in the country with her new lover."

"Her new—*lover*! Do you mean my——" Pepa checked herself, glancing at her mother; but Louie answered with perfect coolness, and an affected misapprehension of her meaning, on which, but for her childish dislike to the women of Pedro's family, and her conviction that they considered Lil as only too highly honoured by that young man's admiration, even she would hardly have ventured.

"*Your* lover? Oh no, certainly not, I did not know you had one; nor did Lil, I am sure. Do tell me who he is."

"You are making game of me," said Pepa quietly, though her eyes flashed at the impertinence. "I spoke of Lila, for whom I have a friendship, not of myself. Has she then gone out with my brother? He told us he was going to ride to the Quinta to-day; but——"

"To the Quinta Disgraciada?" put in Louie, without waiting for the sentence to be finished. "Ah! then very likely Lil and Mr. Melville will fall in with him. She said

she thought they should stop to rest there. Don Pedro, you know, always says we may."

"Why not? Surely it is always at your disposition when you wish," said Pepa, with the grave, unruffled courtesy of her nation. "But Lilita and this Señor Méville then (how do you call it? I do not know him, no?) are not *with* Pedrito?"

"Not unless they have met at the Quinta; in which case," said Louie, laughing merrily, "they are probably cutting each other's throats at this moment while Lil holds their horses."

"*Cutting their . . . throats!* But for why? Pardon me, I do not understand you," Pepa said, speaking haughtily at last; while the Señora's massive frame was trembling so violently with indignation she could hardly bid her hostess good-bye.

"*Why!*" repeated Louie, her eyes twinkling mirthfully. "Well, if you can't guess, I suppose I mustn't tell you, or Don Pedro will be angry with me. All the same, I hope he won't quite kill Mr. Melville, who really seems very nice. Oh! I forgot you said you didn't know him. He is the new flag-lieutenant of the Admiral's ship, and Lil's latest admirer; and between ourselves I don't think she would like to lose him at present. Poor Don Pedro! I feel for him. Such lovely flowers as he sends her too! It is really

very wicked of Lil to make all the men enamoured of her in the way she does ; but you must not be angry with her, and tell your brother he can have this consolation at least. He is only one of twenty, and she laughs at all the others just the same. She cannot help it ; it is her amusement, that is all ;" and with that she dropped a perky little good-bye kiss on each of Pepa's cheeks, and held up her own with childlike serenity to the Señora.

"Señorita," said the latter, as she duly paid the toll which custom exacted of her, though the dark veins in her eyes, swollen with rage, told that she could rather have taken the audacious child by the throat and strangled her, "I feel for your sister. She may have to pay a heavy price for her amusement some day when—but, oh yes, we will tell my son what you say to him. Never fear!"

She waddled heavily away as she spoke ; and the poor Miss Madrèras, fluttered, frightened, and yet hardly aware how to express either their concern or their sympathy, attended her and her daughter to the top of the stairs in a gale of compliments and farewells. Loo met them on their return, her saucy face rippling over with mischievous laughter.

"And now I must be going, too," she said ; "dear Miss Petronita," putting her small hands on the spinster's arms

and smiling into her grim face, "don't look so terribly shocked. Was I wicked to tease the Sanchez so? But it is such fun, and the truth is I can't bear them. That old woman always looks at us as if we were beggars or criminals, and Pepa is such a pious prude one must laugh at her. Besides, I *know* they go about talking of Lil as if she were desperately in love with their dear Pedro, instead of he with her; and she isn't: not a bit."

"But, Luisa,"—even Miss Carmelita had been made nervous enough to speak rather gravely—"you forget—' *las de Sanchez* ' are old acquaintances of ours, and Pepa is a person for whom we have a great estimation. You should not have mocked at them in the house of their friends. And have you the right to talk as you did of Lilita and that gentleman—Mr. Mélveele? We have met him at the Consulate, and the Beauchamps too have spoken of him; but they did not tell us—"

"Because there is nothing to tell," laughed Louie, quite unabashed. "I only said he *admired* her; and so any one can see that he does. *That's* natural enough, but I wanted to tease the Sanchez and make Pedro jealous. They all flatter him so that he thinks he has only to put out his hand and take anything that pleases him."

"Then there is nothing, after all, between Lila and

the new officer? But you said she was riding with him!"

"Certainly; *and* with Liz, and with old Robert Champion! I never said they were *tête-à-tête*, did I? Oh! you dear, innocent Carmelita; so I took you in too! But don't look so serious about it. It was only a little bit of fun."

"Fun for which I think Lila would have reason to be angry with you."

"Oh no, she wouldn't. She doesn't care *that* for Pedro Sanchez, or how jealous he is. I don't believe she would marry him if it was ever so."

"Indeed, I do not believe she ever will," said Miss Petronita, making *her* comment for the first time, and with ominous dryness.

But when their firebrand of a visitor had departed, the sisters looked at one another in real concern and vexation.

"What barbarous imprudence!" cried Miss Petronita. "The Señora could hardly contain herself with anger. She will never let one of her house address those girls again, and it is well if she does not visit some of the offence on us. Well, I do not like her; but I should like still less to have her for an enemy; and for Pedro—it is no joke to enrage *him*! He is velvet in society; but—put your faith in me

—he is a man with a knife in his face ! If he is mocked at he will avenge himself.”

“But since it was a joke of the child’s, a mere ‘*impertinencia*’,” put in Miss Carmelita, eagerly—“since Lila is not implicated with the other at all, and may very likely care for him—Petrona, would it not be well for me, do you think, to call round there this evening, and explain?”

But Petrona shook her head.

“We do not know la Lilita’s mind,” she said sagely. “These *Hardie* girls are not as others ; and one must not compromise oneself unless one is sure it is for good. I . . . Carmelita, hush ! The Angelus !” and as the first three notes of the bell thrilled faintly from the Cathedral towers over the noise of the city, the two sisters fell on their knees in the shabby little sala, and repeated the pious words with solemn fervency.

In her chair of pain in the room within Isabella bowed her face over her clasped hands and said them too ; and even the little negro girl, leaning over the wooden railings of the corridor to pelt with pea-nut shells an urchin who had run into the patio below, left off that delightful occupation and dropped on her black knees gabbling the treble “Ave Marias” with a speed which none but those who have heard

these daughters of Ham at their devotions could find it possible to conceive. Yet the urchin in the patio beat her, after all, and had got through and shied a pea-nut straight at her nose before the young Dolores had had time to ejaculate the last "Amen."

CHAPTER X.

UNA VENGANZA DE CARNAVAL.

“Oh what a rash and bloody deed is this !”—*‘Hamlet.’*

“And there are dresses, splendid but fantastical,
Masks of all times and nations, Turks and Jews,
And harlequins and clowns with feats gymnastical.”

Lord Byron (‘Beppo’).

“Murder ! Who hath done this ?”—*Otway (‘Venice Preserved’).*

It was the eve of Ash Wednesday. All the fun and fury, all the mirth, the mischief and masquerading of a South American carnival were at their fullest height ; and such reckless, frantic fun, such madcap mischief, such wild masquerading as is only possible to Southern temperaments under a Southern sun : to people who never saw a snow-storm, who know not what a fog means ; but who live in a land where twice a year the golden wheat-fields ripe and redden beneath the fervid sun, where orange orchards make sweet the air, and even the naked sand-hills by the beach blaze with the scarlet blossoms of the verbena : in a city of white, glittering houses girdled on three sides by a sapphire sea : a city

flooded in amber sunshine and arched over by a turquoise sky, where you may watch for weeks, and never see a cloud.

People said there hadn't been a better carnival for years.

Last summer the Government had prohibited all masquerading, owing to one or two political assassinations which had been committed under cover of the grotesque disguises, and the affair had been very dull in consequence; but this year the *edicto* was removed again; and the pent-up energies of the people found double vent in consequence. The sultry air was darkened by showers of flying eggs. The *azoteas*, or flat roofs of the houses, were thronged by gay groups of women and children and some few of their male relations discharging torrents of water on the crowd of men below, or fighting a fierce egg battle with the people on neighbouring roofs; the while tidy Basque and grinning negro servants dashed about in the thick of the fun, laden with fresh boxes of eggs and cans of water for the benefit of their masters and mistresses. In all the fashionable streets the prevailing gaiety was at its gayest, and the mumming most magnificent; for there the masqueraders, many of whom were sons of the best families in the place, paraded before the houses where the prettiest and daintiest damsels were assembled, to reward by volleys of scent and flowers the copious showers of cold water flung over them by these ungrateful maidens.

Here a creature with a goat's head played languishing love-tunes on a guitar ; there three demons, horned and tailed, danced arm-in-arm along the dripping pavements. There again a party of gaily-attired mummers in mediæval costume drove slowly by in a gilded and flower-wreathed car, discharging eggs on every side, and followed by the *vivas* of the surging and excited crowd ; or a little group of English naval officers, wearing "mufti" for the occasion, with shoulders together, and fair, sun-burnt faces flushed with all a sailor's love of frolic, fought a hardy battle against a double row of dark-haired, darker-eyed "*señoritas*", all eager to get a shot at "*los marineros Ingleses*".

Among these latter were Frank Melville and his friend, James Carnegie. It was the last of the three days of Carnival ; but Melville had been prevented, by duties which required him on board the flag-ship, from applying for leave before ; and Lil had not seen him since the afternoon of their ride together. Neither had she seen Pedro Sanchez, whose frequent visits to the Hardys' house had been altogether pretermitted since the night of the little party to which he had not been invited ; but this had not surprised the young lady, nor occasioned her the least regret ; seeing that though she had not met him she had heard from him, and in a manner sufficiently offensive to give her no desire to allow

him any return to the intimacy on which, as she considered, he had so grossly presumed.

It happened in this wise. She was sitting in the balcony on the evening of the "*paséo*", thinking over the events of the day, and in particular over the conversation of her sailor friend, while enjoying the combined luxuries of rest, silence, and a cool night breeze, when something white shot through the darkness surrounding her, and a tiny folded note dropped into her lap, and lay there glittering palely like a falling star. Lil's first impulse was to utter a startled exclamation ; her second, to look about and below her on the chance of discovering the sender of the missive ; but there was no one on the "azotea" or in the balconies of the house opposite, while of the two or three passengers wending their way along the quiet street, none had stopped, or were so much as glancing in her direction as she leant over the balustrade with the romantically launched epistle in her hand.

Yet, as she found on opening it, there was no attempt on the part of the writer to conceal his identity or to master his irate feelings under conventional expressions. It was written in Spanish, and read as follows :

"I rode out this afternoon to the ruined Quinta belonging to my father near the Cerrito, in the hope of finding there some figs of a sort to which I knew Doña Lila was partial.

Unfortunately for me I found something else. That deserted solitude, so far removed in general from fashionable invaders, was tenanted by two people—a young woman and a man. The circumstances left me no alternative but to retire as swiftly as possible, and I did so, as a gentleman should, on the instant. Suffer me, however, to remind Doña Lili (now that she has returned to the shelter of her respectable father's roof), that an empty house, even though belonging to one of the most devoted of her lovers, is not a safe place for a lengthened assignation with another. It is a trifle public, and the '*cariños*' of the favoured one might, if reported by an indiscreet observer, prove dangerous to the reputation of a young lady who is evidently not as careful to provide herself with a duenna as are our '*hijas de España*.'¹

“SANCHEZ.”

Lil looked up, her delicate face stained scarlet, as though some one had struck it a blow. True, she had felt at times that she and her sisters were more unprotected than other girls, that their father left them too much to themselves, that there were people—not wholly contemptible people either—who disliked them without her knowing why; and that there was a light and easy tone in the manner of one or two of their intimate friends, of Captain Carnegie in particular—an indefinable absence of deference or shyness, which often stung and annoyed her without its ever being sufficiently

¹ Daughters of Spain.

definite to give her anything to take hold of : yet, with all this, never—never once in all her young life—had she been insulted before. And, there was no mistaking it, *this* was a gross insult, meant indeed to be one ; and the grosser, as coming from a man who dared, in writing it, to call himself her lover !

For a moment the girl hardly knew what to do with herself in the fierce blaze of indignation and revolt roused in her by the cowardly insolence of the incident. Perhaps if she had had a mother she might have taken the letter to her and asked her what she should do about it ; but, alas for poor Lil ! she had no such wise *confidante* to fly to for counsel or sympathy ; and even if Mr. Hardy had not been the sort of man he was, Pedro Sanchez' letter was one which few girls, however innocent, would have cared to lay before a *father*. She could only clench her little white fists, and grind her pretty teeth in impotent wrath as she muttered, "How dare he ! How *dare* he !" under her breath ; and after a minute or two even this ebullition of feminine passion gave way to a revulsion of feeling equally natural in one so young, so inexperienced, and (though she would not have believed it herself) so absurdly innocent compared with scores on scores of London young ladies, reared in fashionable boarding-schools, and reading this story of her doings with righteous reprobation ; and she actually laughed aloud, a

laugh of genuine girlish scorn, as the childish self-betrayal and jealousy, the ridiculous falsehood in the assumption insinuated in the letter when contrasted with her own prosaic simplicity of intention, and Melville's grave and respectful courtesy in the whole affair, struck on her imagination.

“An *assignation*!” she repeated mockingly, though the colour was still high in her face. “It is evident that he thinks we went there alone, and does not imagine that he is exposing and humiliating himself instead of me. Well, one thing is certain, he shall never come to this house again—*never*! I shall tell Liz not to invite him; and if I meet him I shall simply cut him dead; but I don't think I will tell even her why. She might say something to Louie, and Louie is so dreadfully imprudent, that even to punish him I wouldn't risk it. I should not like any one to know that I had ever been—insulted!”

It came to her at the moment how horrible it would be if Mr. Melville were to hear of it; and how it would seem to emphasise what he had said about the difference between his sister and herself. Ah, dear! what a beautiful, happy picture that was he had drawn of his own quaint, quiet Scottish home, and the homely yet dignified life of the trio who lived there, shut away from all echo, as it seemed, of the pomps and pleasures of the bustling world outside, save when he came

to see them ; and so full of work and interests of its own : work, not only for one another, but for all within their reach : interest in all the little pains and pleasures of every humble peasant in the neighbourhood, almost of every bird and beast. No wonder men's hearts turned with reverent faith and tenderness to the women of such houses, and for the first time in her life Lil felt an aching scorn in her for the barren, frothy shallowness of her own life in comparison ; and as she lay down to sleep that night her mind was full of plans—impossible, utopian plans, but which, if properly guided, might have borne good fruit in some form or another—for altering it from that day forth, and making it less selfish and ignoble.

She had forgotten all about Pedro Sanchez and his letter before her eyes closed in slumber ; but her resolution to treat him as he deserved was in no way weakened.

Noted particularly among the masquers in the Carnival of this year were a band of five or six young men, dressed in tight-fitting suits of scarlet silk, and wearing scarlet masks and skull-caps, who carried shallow baskets filled with scented missiles, which they were sufficiently chary of discharging, save at the loveliest or most fashionable of the beauties lining the house-tops and balconies above them, to make their attentions eagerly appreciated by the latter. It was pretty generally known indeed, that this party was made

up of some of the wealthiest and best born young bachelors in the city, and though the secret of the identity of each had been carefully kept, and the dresses were so designed as to form an absolute and complete disguise, guesses were freely hazarded among the girls honoured by their attentions as to the personality of each ; and it is not perhaps too much to say that any one of the former could have picked out her particular admirer, or the individual most admired by her, with as much ease as though he had worn no disguise at all.

Three times during the last day of Carnival this "*troupe*" passed through the street in which the Hardys lived, and never without pausing a moment or two before the house on whose roof the three English girls, with their fair, refined faces, their golden hair, and slender, white-robed figures made a point of general attraction for the combatants below ; but though this mark of favour made the "*Inglesas*" more than ever objects of envy to the girls on neighbouring houses ; and though one of the Scarlet Masks lingered even behind the others, and singled out Lil from her sisters by the persistency with which he showered her with bonbons and perfumed trifles from his basket, the girl never even stooped to pick them up, or gave him any notice, or threw so much as a drop of water over him ; but let her hands fall to her side, and moved contemptuously away, spurning his offerings with her

feet, even though he stood right beneath her; and though Loo, excited beyond all discretion, cried out at the top of her shrill young voice:

“Drench him, Lil! throw something at him! He *wants* you to. Don’t you *know* who it is? Pedro—Pedro Sanchez!”

It was just at that moment, however, that the English officers afore-mentioned were seen, making their way through the crowd with true British determination as they bore down upon their countrywomen’s dwelling: Melville’s usually grave face radiant with almost boyish fun and laughter as he elbowed his way along, streaming with water from the showers flung at his good-looking head from the balconies above, and guarding with one arm a basket which he carried slung round his neck for the convenience of leaving his hands freer. Lil’s mood changed instantly at the sight, and she came quickly and frankly forward, her fair face shining with its sweetest smiles as Melville took off his hat to her and called out in clear hearty tones:

“How do you do! Did you think I had forgotten my promise? Take that from a ‘*nice mascerado!*’” the while he extracted from his basket a great breast-knot bunch of scarlet geraniums, and flung it straight at her golden head.

Lil stretched out her pretty hands to clutch it; but as

she had warned him, it is difficult to aim correctly when jostled by a crowd in an ill-paved street slippery with running water ; and the bouquet only touched her hair and fell at Lisbeth's feet behind her ; while a second one was still more unfortunate, and Melville had the mortification of seeing it strike the balcony and fall back into the road, where it was ground under the heel of one of the Scarlet Masks who happened to be shooting by.

The third essay was a better one, however. Determined not to be foiled with his last flower, a great, perfumy yellow rose, and disappoint the lovely, wistful expectancy of Lil's watchful eyes, the sailor stepped back a pace or two, to take surer aim, measured the distance with a glance ; and then, laughing triumphantly, sent the blossom flying, straight and sure as a cricket-ball, into the hollow palms of the two white hands opened to receive it. He never saw the girl's radiant look, however, as she caught the trophy ; nor the quick graceful gesture with which she put it in her bosom ; for in the same instant there was a movement in the throng, a Scarlet Mask jostled roughly against him, and he missed his footing and fell, amid a shriek of laughter from the crowd of merrymakers as they rushed past.

One moment more, and a girl's voice rang suddenly out in a sharp, piteous cry upon the sun-bathed air. Frank Melville

had not risen at once, as might have been expected. He lay still, face downwards, with his hands extended as if clutching at the pavement, to which they seemed to have grown strangely similar in colour; and as Carnegie, thinking he was stunned, dashed forward and lifted him in his arms, the head he raised fell heavily backward, and showed a face livid, pinched, with parted, bloodless lips, and eyes set in a glazed blank stare for all eternity. *He had been stabbed to the heart*, and over the stones where he had lain a slender crimson stream was trickling slowly away into a horrible little pool!

Down at the other end of the street the merriment waxed louder and louder, and the crowd surged and shouted round a wreathed and painted car drawn by six mules, and holding six mummers carrying aloft a little child arrayed as Bacchus; while about it the Scarlet Masks flashed and circled like living flames of fire.

But Lil stood on the *azotea* looking down. God pity her!—she was only nineteen. The yellow roses were still in her breast, and her two hands still clasped them above the throbbing whiteness of her flesh, while her great, sweet blue eyes were fixed and distended, gazing, gazing, gazing with a dim, sickening horror past all words, all comprehension even, at the dead face below, which stared up at her in dumb, eternal accusation.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DAY AFTER.

"I was so young—I had no mother. God forgot me."

R. Browning.

"False tongue of woman! and heart more false!

.

Thou art a man

Restless and violent. What wouldst thou with me,

A feeble girl——"—*Longfellow* ('*The Spanish Student*').

It must have been somewhere between ten and eleven o'clock on the morning of Ash Wednesday when a gentleman entered the open portal of the Hardys' house; and, without troubling himself to knock, proceeded straight upstairs with the air of one too familiar with the way, or too sure of finding those he wanted within, to stand in need of any preliminary formalities; though the absolute stillness reigning in the house might have led to the supposition that the whole family had gone out for the day.

It was a stillness, however, which seemed only a sequence of that which lay over the whole city; and nothing certainly could have formed a stronger contrast with the mad fury,

fun, and turmoil of the three preceding days than the sombre quiet and sadness, outpassing even that of a Scotch Sabbath, which reigned throughout Monte San Felipe (and almost every other town on the South American continent) on this, the opening day of Lent.

Here and there perhaps in the gutters might be found a few minute fragments of broken eggshells; but for the most part the "*basura*"¹ carts had with the first dawn of daylight conveyed away every relic of Carnival *débris*; while the scorching summer sunshine had long since dried up the water which only yesterday flowed in copious rivulets over the narrow streets; and only the tin capsule of a scent-squirt glittering between a couple of paving-stones, or a scrap of bright-coloured ribbon left dangling from the ironwork of some balcony, bore testimony to the scene of madcap revelry which for three days had held riotous sway throughout the city.

Now, even the shops were shut; business was at a standstill, and the only people to be seen in the white, sunny streets were little groups of decorous-looking men and grave-faced women, for the most part dressed in black, and wending their way, prayer-book in hand, to and from one or other of the churches whose bells kept up a constant, solemn vibration upon the blue, sun-thrilled air. Even the wind was hushed,

¹ Dust.

and scarcely a ripple heaved the shining waters of the bay, while the curious effect of the smutty cross traced in penitential ashes on the brow of nearly every passer-by (those of the lower orders in particular who had done their "*misa de cenisas*" early in the day), added to the general air of solemn gravity and mournfulness pervading the whole of the gay and worldly city.

There was little of this religious solemnity, however, in the inflamed and writhen features of the man ascending the Hardys' staircase; and when on reaching the top he found the door there closed (a most unusual circumstance), his first impulse seemed to be to put his hand on it and thrust it open by main force. Fortunately, however, recollection came in time for him to check this impulse; and, instead, he rang at the bell, muttering to himself with a bitter smile: "So! they are going to pretend to be out, are they? But that won't avail with me. We shall see!" and patting the floor impatiently with his foot until the slipshod feet of old Juana had had time to convey her unwieldy person to the door in flurried answer to his impatient peal.

As she opened it, however, the man, pressing rudely forward, caught a glimpse of Lisbeth Hardy standing within the half open "*sala*" door opposite, and in the act of whispering some hurried injunction to the old woman, of which the

final words—"not to *anybody*!"—were alone audible ; but, thanks to the intruder's movement, they came too late. With a gesture too prompt for the old servant to withstand, he had thrust himself into the corridor ; and before Liz could even obey her first swift instinct of retreat, was addressing her.

"How do you do, Miss Hardy ? I see you are at home, so I suppose I may come in, especially as my call is on business."

Whatever Lisbeth's feelings were she made no show of them.

"Why certainly, Captain Carnegie," she said, coming forward with a perfectly gracious smile on her fair face, which looked more sedately pretty than usual under the demure little black lace bonnet which crowned the nut-brown tresses ; "very glad to see you, though I was not expecting callers at this early hour. Indeed," with a gently monitory glance at the large, red-leaved prayer-book lying ostentatiously on a table near her, "we were just getting ready for church. There is plenty of time, however."

"Plenty for you," retorted the officer roughly, and with an ugly sneer lighting for an instant the almost fierce rigidity of his face. "*Church*, eh ? Well, if there is anything in that, some people want it for certain."

"We all do, I'm afraid," said Liz sweetly, though if the

Venetians had not been down to exclude the sunlight, one might have noticed a gathering paleness in her smooth cheek, and a slightly harder tension of the round under lip. "Won't you sit down?" she added, turning away from him, and sinking down herself into a low chair with her back to the light. Captain Carnegie shook his head.

"Thank you, no," he said, in the same abrupt manner as before. "I would rather stand—*here*; and when I said there was plenty of time for your churchgoing, I meant that I had no intention of detaining you from it. I came to see your sister—Miss Lil."

"Lil?" repeated the elder sister rather falteringly. She was certainly paler now, but she held her face down, and busied herself in arranging the lace ends of her tie as she added: "I am really very sorry, but——"

"But she is getting ready for church too, I suppose you are going to say," Captain Carnegie interrupted. "Well, I'm sorry too, for I'm afraid I must detain *her*. As I said, I came on business, and it is to say a few words to her which won't keep."

"Then I'm afraid I must ask you to say them to me instead," said Liz, dropping the lace end she had been manipulating, and raising her eyes to his with tranquil firmness; "for—as I was going to say if you had allowed me—Lil is

not well enough to see you this morning. The heat of the sun and the play during the last three days have given her an awful headache, which I dare say has been made worse by the sight of that unfortunate accident to your poor friend, happening as it did so near this house. It is lucky *I* did not see it, for I should have been still more upset—in bed to-day, I dare say; but fortunately I was further off, so I can ask you about him now. I hope your being here to-day is a sign that it is not quite such a bad affair as we feared; and that you came to tell us poor Mr. Melville was not fatally . . . hurt?"

Liz had one of those soft, slow-speaking voices whose very clearness of enunciation makes interrupting them a work of difficulty; but there was some courage in her deliberate exaggeration of this habit to-day, and in the calm, inexpressive gaze of her blue eyes, which she kept fixed on her visitor's haggard, wrathful face, as if forbidding the utterance of any but the merely matter-of-fact expressions of sympathetic courtesy with which she chose to treat the subject to which she alluded.

Liz was by no means utterly heartless. The terrible event of yesterday had greatly shocked her. Even to speak of it paled her cheek with natural awe and distress; and under usual circumstances her inquiries as to poor young Melville's

fate would have been made with far more warmth and eagerness; but at the present moment she had a reason of her own for not betraying any special interest in the unfortunate officer, a reason intensified by his friend's tone and manner, and which led her to adopt one even more superficially cool and unexcitable than the briefest acquaintanceship with the murdered man would have made natural in most young and feeling women.

That is the worst of acting. One is so apt to overdo one's part: more especially if one is not sure of one's audience.

Yet Lisbeth's coolness was not wholly unsuccessful after all. It enforced a moment for self-control on the terribly excited man in front of her, and she profited by it; for though his eyes fairly blazed, and the big veins swelled up in his temples under her calm, unemotional gaze, he refrained from interrupting her again, till she paused of her own accord.

"Miss Hardy," he said then, speaking hoarsely and in a tone of such bitter dislike and scorn as made her wince, little as she cared for him, "I don't mean to be rude to you; but if you think I came here to-day to talk to you about my—friend—God! even *you* perhaps may know the meaning of that word one day—you're wrong. What's more, I've nothing to say that would be any news to you. If you,

yourself, didn't see him murdered in front of your windows there: murdered to add one drop more to the damnable vanity cup——”

“*Captain Carnegie!*” Liz rose up, her smooth cheek flushing angrily.

“What, I forgot myself, and used a strong expression? Well, I didn't mean to do so, and I beg your pardon. I don't wish to give you a handle for turning me out before I've done my errand; and, as I said, it's not *you* that it concerns. Don't try me too far, however, by asking me questions about a thing you know a deal more of than I. I don't ask *you* for sympathy or compunction, I know they are not things you deal in. I asked to see your sister.”

“And, as I told you, it is quite impossible for you to do so,” said Liz coldly. “If you will call again to-morrow, or even this evening, when she may be feeling better——”

“To-morrow or this evening will not do, Miss Hardy. Do you think I would have come here to-day—*here* of all places!—if it hadn't seemed necessary to me for the sake of him lying aboard the flag-ship there?—and as you say Miss Lil is not in bed——”

“She is not *in bed* certainly,” said Liz, somewhat indignantly, “but she is quite too unwell in my opinion to see visitors at this early hour, and in the state of—of—I must

say, unwarrantable excitement under which you seem to be labouring."

"Unwarrantable, you think it, Miss Hardy?"

"Completely so. Not, however," said Liz, suddenly changing her tone of offence for one of most sweet and womanly tenderness, "that I don't feel for you in the shock from which I know you must be suffering. It was dreadful of course, *most* dreadful, whether due to accident or some mad freak of a tipsy masquerader; and as poor Mr. Melville's friend, it is only natural you should feel it greatly. Even we (slight as our acquaintance with him was) have been quite saddened and upset by such a sorrowful termination to the Carnival gaieties; but all the same, to speak as you are doing, and in a house where I think I must say you have never received anything but kindness and hospitality, is really, really——"

Lisbeth's tone had grown warmer; and she broke off there partly because she was out of breath, and partly as if her compassion for the offender made her averse from speaking of his conduct as strongly as it deserved; but all Captain Carnegie's sailorly good-breeding seemed to be gone, and he showed little of either shame or ruth as he said, looking at her keenly, and speaking in a quieter tone:

"So! That is the light in which you put it, eh? Well,

as it happens, you couldn't have chosen a better ; and you will make my task a much easier one if you will be kind enough to stick to it. Still I am afraid Miss Lil is not, in general, quite as far-seeing or as sensible as yourself ; and, by your leave, I must see her all the same."

"Can you not give me a message for her? I assure you I will deliver it quite accurately."

"Thank you. I don't doubt it ; but there are some things one can only say for oneself."

"Surely nothing that *you* have any right to say to my sister, Captain Carnegie !"

"That is for her to question. Will you tell her I am here, and what I have come for?"

"My dear Captain Carnegie, it would be no use. Even if she were willing——"

"You won't, then?"

"I am very sorry, but——"

"All right. I shall go to your father instead ;—I'm sorry too, Miss Hardy, for your sister's sake and yours ; for, though you mayn't believe it (and though I own it was for no love of you young ladies), I came here to-day to do you a service. Thank yourself for putting it out of my power. Mr. Hardy will do just as well for *me*."

Lisbeth started, the colour deepening in her face.

“ Really, Captain Carnegie, you are very persistent,” she said angrily, though with a nervous quiver about her lips and hands which showed he had flurried her at last. “ You call here at an hour when it is not usual here for ladies to receive visitors, and ask for my sister. I tell you what is the plain truth—that she is not well. There is nothing wonderful in that, of course. Last year I had Louie down with a touch of fever for several days after Carnival ; but you insist on seeing her all the same. Well, since you are in trouble I have no doubt she is unselfish enough to make an effort to gratify you ; but it will not be with my approval ; and—and no gentleman would ask for it.”

She had turned towards the door communicating with the bed-rooms, but paused a moment with her hand on the latch. Captain Carnegie did not, however, make her any answer. He did not even look after her, though a slight smile broke for an instant the hard lines of his mouth while she was speaking. He knew well enough from the first word that he had got his way ; and he did not seem to care how he got it, or what she said to him.

You must have some respect for a woman before her disapprobation can hurt you, and Captain Carnegie had no respect for the Hardy family.

A sound in the room aroused him when he had been alone

for some minutes. He was so absorbed indeed in his own gloomy thoughts that he had not even heard the door open and close again; but it must have done so, for some one spoke; and when he looked round Lil was standing just within the room, with one hand resting on the back of a chair, as if to support herself.

Lil!—but so changed in the last twenty-four hours that it needed only one glance at her to see why her sister was so resolutely anxious to keep her out of sight, and that the plea of illness was no mere excuse.

Even he felt some slight stirrings of pity as he looked at her, that bright, radiant young thing who only yesterday had seemed a living incarnation of girlish youth and grace and gaiety: he who had come there with about as much gentleness in him as in a tiger whose cub has been shot dead between its feet.

She was deadlily, ghastlily pale. There was not a tinge of colour in her lovely little face, save the reddened, swollen eyelids, beneath which the sunken eyes gazed out at him with a dazed and piteous stare which really looked as if her brain was suffering from the shock she had received. Even her helplessly parted lips had a faint bluish tinge, and her hair, which had been hurriedly brushed back from her face for tidiness, thus making it look all the stranger from the

absence of all her little curls and vanities, was roughly bundled up at the back in a loose plait, the ends of which were already drooping upon the shoulders of the crumpled cotton wrapper which she had on, and through which the nervous trembling which shook her slender limbs from head to foot could be distinctly seen.

Her reception of him too was as different from that of Lisbeth as her appearance. She did not offer him her hand, or even speak at first. Indeed all ideas of conventional greetings or politeness seemed to have been swept out of the poor girl's mind by the horror which ever since yesterday had possessed it, and it was only when she saw that he remained silent with his frowning gaze fixed on the floor, that she spoke in a weak, barely audible voice :

“Liz said . . that you wanted . . to . . to see . . .”

James Carnegie looked at her sharply, the gloom on his brow growing deeper as he did so. That momentary gleam of pity had faded almost before the sound of her voice ; and the very consciousness of the frail, exquisite loveliness which no grief could extinguish, and through which (as he believed) the man he loved best in the world had been done to death, roused his hatred and disgust for the creature who owned it to boiling pitch. He broke in on her faltering speech with harsh abruptness.

"To see you? Yes, perhaps I was a fool, however, and your sister would have done as well; but it's best to make sure. I don't suppose *you* need to ask me why I am here!"

"About—*him*?" She said the words almost under her breath, her already pallid cheeks whitening visibly: then, with a sudden change of look and expression, life, blood and eagerness rushing back into her sweet face in one glad flash. "*He sent you!* You would not have left him if he were really dead. You came to tell me. . . . Oh! thank God!"

Even Carnegie was touched. There was something so candid, so spontaneous in the fervent, joyous thankfulness of this young girl, in the sudden light and radiance dazzling her great, tear-dimmed eyes, the lovely rose-flush rushing up into her poor pale cheeks, that the veriest sceptic in all human truth and honesty could not have disbelieved in it, or imagined it got up for a purpose; but scepticism has a hundred roots, and torn up by one will still find holding-ground by another.

It flashed upon Captain Carnegie that this terror, this anxiety, this sudden joy and relief, were all for her own sake and that of her lover, *the man who had done it*; and for whose safety she might well have been trembling; and the thought hardened him still more against her.

"No," he said, bitterly, "I have not come for that; and

I think, if you'll excuse me, Miss Lil, we'll leave God out of this matter; for I don't think that He has had much to do with it hitherto, or that you and your Spaniard will have much to thank Him for when it comes to the reckoning hereafter. Frank Melville is dead sure enough, and gone aloft with the cleanest log that ever yet a brave sailor and a good man showed to the Captain of all above. *Clean!* If you women could show half as white a one you wouldn't have lives like his to answer for; but even your lovers' daggers (curse the cowardly devils that wield them!) are truer than you. *They* make no slips."

His passion had mounted till it had carried him beyond himself, almost beyond remembrance of where he was or whom addressing. It was terrible to see the working of his plain, rugged face, the swelling of the veins on his strong, sunburnt, tightly-clenched hands; but Lil made no answer nor attempt to check him. She had sunk into the chair beside which she had been standing. The transient flush had given way already to an almost livid pallor, and the brightness in her eyes to their old look of piteous bewilderment and pain; while Carnegie's bitter words simply fell upon her like a rain of pebbles on one already stunned by a heavy stone. She knew that he was very angry with her; but she herself was oppressed with such a sense of guilt that

no thought of resenting his anger, or defending herself, came to her assistance ; and (as sometimes happens with savage, hot-blooded natures) her very silence and impotence irritated her assailant to still fiercer wrath.

“ I’m using bad language and wasting your time,” he said after a moment’s pause, “ and you’re terribly nervous because you see that I know who was Frank Melville’s murderer, and want to know whether I’m here to-day to tell you that I mean to make him swing for it. Aye, perhaps to put you yourself in the witness-box against him for that end. Well, I’ll put you out of your pain. I’ve *not* come for that purpose. Still you needn’t look so relieved. If I spare you so far as publicity is concerned, I’m not going without *some* reward for my magnanimity. I’m going to hear you own that you need it ; that you do know who the cowardly cur was who stabbed Lieutenant Melville yesterday ; and, what’s more, that you know his motive for the deed, eh !—will you ? ”

Lil looked up at him. There was no indignation in her eyes, only a slight contraction of the delicate brows, an irrepressible shudder shivering through her whole body, which testified to her repugnance to utter the word demanded of her ; yet after a momentary gasp for breath, she spoke it in a low hoarse whisper, like a child giving some message too terrible to utter aloud

"*Pedro Sanchez!* He was the Scarlet Mask—I am sure of it."

Captain Carnegie's teeth met suddenly with a sort of snap. He had never expected her to own to it so easily, or in such a manner; but the conviction that it was only his own savagery which had terrified her into candour, did not induce him to soften it as yet.

"Ah!" he said brutally, "I told you I could make you hang him; but that's not all. You haven't said *why* he did it. I want that too."

"*For me!*" She uttered the words in the same trembling, miserable whisper; then with a sudden cry of terror at the sound of them, and lifting her little white hands in piteous appeal to the vengeful man standing over her. "Oh! no, no, *no*, Captain Carnegie, don't make me say that!—don't let me think it! Please, please don't! It would kill me if I did, and it can't—it *can't* be true."

The sailor's smile was not pleasant to see.

"Aye!" he said, "but it is; and I pray God that as long as you live—yes, and at the hour of your death, that thought, the thought that a man's blood is on your soul, shed for no cause but your own worthless vanity and caprice, may never leave you. It won't kill you. I know you women too well. After the first little bit of fright that you're in now is over,

you'll begin to be proud of it: to boast, maybe, of having seen one of your lovers stabbed by another, for the sake of your beauty, and——”

“*Captain Carnegie*, don't! Pray, pray don't! You cannot mean to say such things, and to me!” She was roused at last. The pitiless lash of his tongue had stung her; not indeed to anger, but to appeal from the anguish he was inflicting. It was of no use, however.

“‘Not mean them’?” he repeated bitterly. “Isn't it true then, that you knew this Sanchez was in love with you; that you accepted his attentions, till the whole town thought you were engaged to him; and then, for a whim, a caprice, perhaps to bring him on the quicker—that same old game your sister played with me—that you turned a cold shoulder on him, and took up Frank Melville instead, an almost stranger to you, a——”

“But I did not. I did not!” sobbed Lil, the tears breaking in torrents from her lovely eyes: her bosom rising and falling under the thin cotton gown with passionate agitation. “I never meant, or thought——”

“You never thought to play one man off against the other; to keep the Spaniard dangling at your heels till you were almost sure of him, and then to goad him into jealousy, and exhibit your triumph in greater relief by turning to Melville,

and making love to him instead, keeping him at your side for a whole evening, consulting him about your private conduct—*him!* a man who knew nothing of you; nor you of him—taking him out riding with you; and insisting on separating yourself from the rest of your party, so that you and he might spend an afternoon alone together at the Quinta of this very Spaniard! Tush, Miss Lil! What is the good of you and me playing at ignorance, or make-believe in this matter, when the other man who was with you on that ride, was joking afterwards over a *café* billiard-table with a lot of fellows about ‘the dead set Lil Hardy was making at that new flag-lieutenant’; and when your own sisters have been going about boasting of him as your last lover, and of how you amused yourself between him and young Sanchez! I heard *that* last night, and I know it’s true; and this also, that just as surely as the one man stabbed the other in consequence of it, so surely your hand pointed the knife. Dare you deny it, *now?*”

But Lil made no answer.

CHAPTER XII.

CARNEGIE'S DECISION.

"Oh! I could——

I could say much, but must not,—no, I will not!

Do as you please, I have no friend, no witness,

Save my accusers. . . ."—*G. Colman* ('*The Iron Chest*').

"Maybe she doth but counterfeit.

Oh God! counterfeit! There was never counterfeit of passion came so near the life."—*Much Ado About Nothing*.

THE girl had dropped back again into her old position, and seemed to be listening less to him than to some other voice audible only to herself. Truth and falsehood—truth as to actual facts, falsehood cruel and unjust as to motive and colouring, were indeed so blended in Carnegie's bitter tirade, that her wounded spirit seemed to sink crushed and helpless under a sense of utter impotence for either answer or defence.

Was this how men talked of her, and was it true? Surely not all men: not *he* who . . . He never seemed to think lightly of any women. He could tell . . . but no, he could

never tell anything now. He was *dead*, dead through her, and this officer—his friend—said

The poor child's mind was in truth almost worn out by misery and emotion. She had forgotten Captain Carnegie's presence : forgotten that he was speaking, and he had to come a step nearer to attract her attention.

" Well," he said, with some satisfaction in the harsh gloom of his voice, " I'm glad that you don't deny it. I've never been fond of you young ladies since Miss Liz there opened my eyes to your little ways nearly three years ago ; but till now I've always thought *you* rather better than the others. Still there's one more unpleasant thing I must say to you, however mortifying you may find it. You think of Frank Melville as a lover of yours, and your sisters have talked of him as such. If you or they ever do so again, or boast of his having perilled his life for the sake of a smile from you, you will be thinking and talking of what is a lie, and those who hear you will know that it is one. He *never* cared for you : not one jot ! Pretty and fascinating as you may be, you never fascinated *him* ; and he told me so himself, as he told me most things, for we were like brothers. While you were laying out your meshes to win him, he was not even thinking enough of you to see what you were at. He was in love, wrapped up heart and soul in another woman—a woman I

wouldn't even name in this house—whose name was the last on his lips as we turned the corner of this street yesterday ten minutes before his assassination, who was his promised wife; and whom he was going to marry at the end of this very cruise. There is a letter ready for posting to her by to-day's mail lying on his desk now. He wouldn't even ask for leave the day before yesterday (though he let out that you had urged him to do so, and to come and play Carnival with you), that he might have the more time for writing to *her*, and packing up some little curiosities he had been collecting for her; so you may judge how little of reality there was in the 'conquest' your sisters boasted you had made; and I tell you this partly because it is the plain truth, as you may find out for yourself from others; and partly because it may influence you to assist me (as I mean you shall) in carrying out the decision I have come to about how to act in this matter.

"I've made you own the name of Melville's murderer to me, and the motive for the murder. Now listen to me in return. *I'm not going to make use of that avowal*; nor to expose either of you; nor to stir up any scandal in the matter. On the contrary, I'm going to kill what has been raised already. Not for *your* sake, mind you,—I don't want to humbug you; but for his who is gone, and for the sake of those a thousand times dearer to him than himself. If I

were *sure*—sure and certain—of making that assassin swing for his work, I don't think I could help doing it; but they tell me that in this country of cut-throats human life counts as nothing beside a bag of dollars; and that even if I succeeded in proving *which* of the masquers dealt the stab (which there are ninety chances to one against my doing, seeing that they would all band together to shield the culprit) there wouldn't be even that remotest one in favour of his being convicted or punished. It would be put down to an affair of gallantry, a '*vinganza de carnaval*' for an Englishman's impertinence to an honourable man's sweetheart; and at the worst Sanchez would get a year's exile, which he would spend in a trip to Europe, and return from with more *éclat* than ever.

"No, Miss Lil. I'm not going in for that. The game isn't worth the candle. I think he'd better go on his trip, and quickly; for I give him full warning through you that if he is in this town to-morrow I'll pick a quarrel with him myself and shoot him like a dog; but I won't appeal to the law, since the only people to be punished through the knowledge I have would be those who will suffer heavily enough as it is. You don't know the Melvilles. *I* do. General Melville was my guardian; and the only mother I've ever known, the woman who stands highest on God's earth to me, is Frank's mother; while the holiest, sweetest creature I've

ever seen (maybe I might have fallen in love with her myself but that I knew she was too good for me) is the girl he was engaged to ; and if there was to be a scandal about his death ; if they were to hear that he who came next to God with them—bless their pure hearts !—had been stabbed in a vulgar affair about *a woman*, for paying attentions to another man's sweetheart, I believe on my soul it would kill them. They sha'n't hear it. They sha'n't have that additional pang, even if his murderer has to go free to spare it them ; and all I've got to say now is that I look to *you*, to you and your sisters, to help me in it. If I save you from scandal and exposure, you shall save him from falsehood and calumny. If you've talked of him as your lover, or let others do so, you've got to deny the report now wherever it has gone. If you've been pluming yourself on the idea that he was stabbed for your sake, you've got to assert, when this affair is discussed, that it was no such thing ; that the stab was received in a scuffle, and intended for some one else (if you like, in trying to come between the assassin and his victim) ; and you've got to *talk* about his engagement ; of how soon he was to have been married ; and of his passionate love for the girl, as if you'd known about it all along. That's your work : and if you've any human heart in you for those broken ones across the Atlantic, or any compunction for your share in yesterday's

crime, you'll do it and make your sisters do it too. If you don't, you know the consequences, and it was to tell you this that I came to you myself to-day, and left his dead body—the body of the bravest sailor, the best man and truest friend I've ever known—to enter this house which ropes wouldn't have dragged me into for any other reason. Would to God I had never brought him inside it!”

He had stopped at length, out of breath and exhausted with grief and passion, his keen love for his murdered friend warring with such fierce wrath and hatred against those who had worked this woe to him, that he never even noticed that Lil had not answered, had not moved, or spoken; but sat cowering in the low chair where she had sunk down, her cold hands clenched upon her knee, her head drooping forward till the long fair plaits which had broken loose from their fastenings at the back, fell in two heavy strands across her bosom. He had taken up his cap and crossed the room to go, before she seemed to wake with a violent start, and staggered to her feet, uttering his name in a hoarse, unnatural voice, which no human being could have told for that of sweet, silver-tongued Lil Hardy.

The sailor had his hand on the door; but it stopped him, and he looked over his shoulder at her.

“I want you . . . to forgive me,” she said, a dusky, livid

spot of colour coming and going like a pulse in either cheek, a strange, wild light in her eyes, only a moment back so dull and lifeless. "You have said things . . you will be sorry some day . . but you didn't know . . you *can't* understand ; and *he*—he who would have told you . . he is dead. He was not my lover. He never said a word. He only . . helped me. And see, I have no mother. I am only nineteen. How could I guess the—the other would . . . I ought to be angry, I suppose, and too proud to say anything to you ; but somehow I can't be. You—*loved* him. I will do whatever you tell me ; but I want you to say that you forgive me, that . . that I may forgive myself."

Captain Carnegie looked at her. If she had only not been so pretty, so fatally, seductively pretty ; if the graceful curves of her supple young body had not reminded him so forcibly of Lisbeth's in some private theatricals in which she had once acted ; if her voice, broken and husky as it was, had not retained that liquid, half-Spanish accent which unkind people called "the Hardy lisp", he could scarcely have withstood the poor, anguish-stricken girl's humble entreaty ; but her very beauty and fascination maddened him. The sight of them hardened him against her, remembering how *he* had humbled himself in the vain effort to soften Liz long ago ; and he answered her :

“ ‘Forgive you!’ Aye, when I forgive Frank Melville’s assassin; or—when I *want* you to forgive yourself. Pshaw! Miss Hardy, what have you to do with me, or I with you? You’re safe from me as long as you do as you’ve engaged, and keep clear of any one I care for in the future. For the rest, if we never see each other again so much the better for both of us.”

He went out as he spoke, shutting the door heavily behind him; and Lil lay, face downwards on the floor, a white, senseless heap.

* * * * *

Liz found her so on her return from church. She *had* gone there after all, though much exercised in spirit as to whether she ought to do so, considering Captain Carnegie’s worse than unfriendly tone, and Lil’s utterly broken-down condition; but when she hinted at the latter to prepare her sister for what he might say, and even offered to be present at the interview, Lil only shook her head, and rose at once from the bed she was lying on.

“You mean that he is angry with me!” she said, lifting her heavy, swollen eyes to her sister’s face; “that he thinks me accountable? Does he know then who it was? Oh! if he does, it is no wonder he is angry. *They* were such friends. No, Liz, I—I would rather go alone. Perhaps he

may have *something* to tell—some messages—if it were only one word to help me to forget that face, I . . I think I could bear it better.”

So she had gone in alone and just as she was, save that Liz hurriedly fastened up her loose hair (untouched that morning), and passed a brush over the damp locks, glued with tears against her pale cheeks, and when she was gone, the elder sister decided to betake herself to church after all. How could she tell what people would be saying of them if she didn't?

It was that indeed of which Liz was chiefly thinking. Her calm, native acuteness had grasped at once the conclusion at which Captain Carnegie, in his love for Frank's mother and sweetheart, had also arrived—that for Lil, or any of them, to have their names mixed up in the affair of young Melville's assassination would be undesirable in every way. People (as she had once said) were sufficiently given already to looking black at them; and this unlucky affair would give some a fresh handle for doing so of which they would not be slow to avail themselves, if it could be made out that the unfortunate young man's death was in any way owing to Lil's too facile fascinations and Louie's flippant tongue. Better even to shield Pedro Sanchez if necessary, than that *they* should assume any special cognizance of the hand by

whom the murder had been committed ; and indeed, at the bottom of her heart, Liz was conscious of a faint feeling of irritation against the murdered man himself for *letting* himself be killed. It was just in accordance with his character generally, which, she had decided, was too serious and wanting in humour the very first time she met him. Another man would have made quite a charming little romance out of the attack, would have parried the thrust ; or, if unable to prevent himself from being slightly wounded, would have posed as a hero for months afterwards in consequence, and would have raised Lil to the dignity of his fellow-heroine, a modern queen of the tournament, instead of the participator in an awful, miserable tragedy, the provocant of a brutal, cowardly murder.

It is not necessary to say that Liz did not confide these ideas to her sister, nor indeed did she formulate them in her own mind ; but they simmered there none the less for being unexpressed ; and made her wish all the more heartily that they could all have appeared at church on Ash Wednesday with no more outward show of grief and indignation than would be manifested by all the rest of the little English-speaking community at the assassination of an officer of their own country ; and when she found that this was absolutely impossible in Lil's case, she at once decided on leaving Loo at

home too ; so that the absence of one only, and *the* one who might have been already spoken of as the object of Lieutenant Melville's attentions, might not be specially noted.

It was a trying service, however. The day was intensely hot ; and though the big ugly windows were shaded by green calico blinds, the fierce sunlight seemed to filter through them and be refracted back from the white-washed walls of the chapel on the hapless congregation as they stood and sat and knelt, and did ceaseless, if languid, battle with the flies and mosquitoes through two lengthy hours of prayers and psalms, lessons and cursings, sermon and litany, delivered to them in "good measure, heaped up, pressed down and shaken together," by the energetic Mr. Spate. Liz was prepared for the sermon, the chaplain having a habit of "pointing the moral" by allusions, more or less thinly disguised, to those among the congregation who appeared to him to have been lately transgressing the commandment, whatever it was, which happened to be under discussion ; but when (not content with a long and solemn peroration on the evil wickedness of joining in any way in that "iniquitous and popish Saturnalia called Carnival," exemplified as by "a direct judgment of Providence, in the sad and terrible event of yesterday,") he proceeded to make a long and awful pause in the Litany, following after that petition wherein we pray to be delivered from "*battle*,

murder, and sudden death," the last two words uttered in a peculiarly deep and lugubrious tone, it was difficult for Miss Hardy to repress a visible shudder ; while many of the other ladies pulled out handkerchiefs or salt-bottles ; and some gave way to audible sobs.

The real trial, however, was afterwards, when the service was over, and when the congregation gathered under the shelter of the heavy pillared portico, and discussed with all manner of questions and comments, and every varying version of the story which could enter into the imagination of men, the incidents of which Liz perhaps knew more than any there, and was willing to appear to know less.

Of course she could have escaped it, had she so desired ; but this would have been a cowardly course, and might only have drawn on her the comments she was anxious to avoid ; so she stood her ground manfully, joining easily and naturally in the discussion over the popular subject ; answering questions and making surmises with an appearance of eager frankness which, while revealing nothing to those who knew least, baffled the suspicions of those better informed ; and so steadily impressing her own colouring of the event on each mention of it by the constant repetition of such words as "the dense crowd,"—"in the scuffle,"—"poor Mr. Melville's ignorance of Spanish,"—"how grateful the *intended* victim

must have been!"—that hardly one of her hearers left her without the idea that the affair was much less interesting than they had supposed from not being one of malicious intention after all, but a mere stupid accident originating in that aptitude of English officers for mixing themselves up with rows with which they had no concern. This impression was perhaps intensified by the unemotional, matter-of-fact tone which Liz chose to adopt in conveying it; and by her ready disclaimer of any special interest in, or intimacy with, the murdered man, coupled with a constant reference to the Beauchamps, as "those who knew him best," for further information:—all of which was so different from the Hardy girls' usual way of appropriating altogether those of their male friends who gave them even the slightest handle for doing so, as to make her modesty on this occasion pass for even more than it was worth.

"I don't believe it was in front of the Hardys' house at all," one good lady declared, with the incisive acumen of her sex. "Some one said so, and that he was in the act of throwing flowers at Lil when he was stabbed; but you may be sure that was only a story built out of the love those girls have for making themselves prominent in anything concerning naval people. Even Liz, you see, couldn't say, when I pressed her, that he was throwing at *any* of them; and besides,

if it had really occurred as near them as she said, she would have been able to tell more clearly how it was done ; and the body would have been brought into their house, while a doctor was sent for, instead of being taken all the way to the Consulate. It is little tell-tale facts like that which show up those girls' vanity."

What a pity it was that Liz did not hear ! But she was in the act of telling some one with smiling deprecation that "those naughty girls, Lil and Loo, had been too lazy to come to church : knocked up with the *usual* Carnival headache. She hoped they would feel ashamed of themselves when she told them of all Mr. Spate's objurgatory expressions on the subject of that festival ;" after which she betook herself homeward, feeling that she, at all events, had done her duty, and meaning to claim considerable gratitude from Lil for the same.

It was a great shock to her to find, on her return, the latter stretched insensible on the floor, with Louie and old Juana kneeling beside her, the one burning feathers under her nose, the while she invoked every saint in the calendar to her assistance, the other dashing eau-de-cologne in her sister's face, and whimpering with terror when these efforts at resuscitation proved of no avail. Lisbeth's arrival, however, soon brought about a better state of things ; and poor Lil was brought back to consciousness, and put to bed with an

injunction not to speak or think about anything till she'd had a sleep ; for the troublesome affair was all over and settled now, and she would only make herself ill if she worried about it ; but unfortunately the warning came too late, and when Lil woke up from the long sleep of exhaustion which followed her fainting fit, it was to a sort of low, nervous fever, all the more difficult to cure or get rid of because she *dared* not give way to it : dared not even remain in bed, or shut herself up ; but, in obedience to Captain Carnegie, forced herself to rise every afternoon, and dress and appear in the sala as if nothing were the matter with her.

She was even obliged to join in frequent discussions on the terrible event which had made the great sensation of this year's Carnival ; to assist friends of an inquiring mind with conjectures as to *who* the assassin could possibly be ; and to listen to complaints as to how slowly the Government investigation was proceeding ; or wonders that the large reward offered by the Admiral and affixed to the Consulate doors had not tempted some one to betray the offender.

Oh, if it *had* done so ! Lil nearly sickened at the thought, while her pulses throbbed at railway speed, and her cheeks burned with the fierce crimson of the fever scorching up her veins as she sat through the gossip she neither dared to silence nor avoid ; and which was often followed by nights of

alternate stupor and wandering, wearing alike to body and brain. With the utter absence of reticence characteristic of her, she had told Liz all about Captain Carnegie's visit, and Liz was very kind to her; and, while raging inwardly against her quondam admirer, and congratulating herself openly on having decided of her own free will on the very course he came to threaten them into, was sensible enough to follow out his hints with a conscientious fidelity which was of great assistance to her sister. It was she indeed who was the first to mention "poor young Melville's engagement to a sweet girl at home, with whom he was passionately in love," and whose grief at his loss she deplored with very pretty sympathy; and it was she who, by dint of repeated scoldings, cautions, and lectures, succeeded in reducing Louie to a condition of prudent acquiescence in her sister's line of conduct; but meanwhile, Government lagged on with its official inquiry, each step advancing about as slowly as if it had been held back under the weight of a bag of dollars; and Lil's convalescence lagged too: flesh and spirits pining away equally under the strain put upon them.

It is doubtful whether she would not have succumbed to it altogether but for a medicine brought to her by the kindly hands of Miss Carmelita, and delivered with a delicate address which I fear betrayed that the proverbially keen-eyed Miss

Madreras were no more blind or deaf than usual to what was going on behind a certain millstone.

Sitting down beside Lil's rocking-chair one afternoon, she gossiped pleasantly away about various social matters, such as the Rev. Mr. Spate's new governess, the last fashion in flources, and Lil's own thin cheeks and feverish hands, which she kindly ascribed to the long succession of hot winds from the north which had been prevailing. "Indeed there is illness everywhere," she said, stroking gently the girl's wasted fingers; "I even hear there has been a case of something like yellow fever on board of the gun-boat of Captain Carnegie, and that it has been ordered away at once to one of those islands in the south—*las Malvinas*—No, what is it you call then in English?—the—the Falk-a-lands, is it not?—to recruit. Mr. Beauchamp says it will not return here at all; but vill proceed to England at the end of a month; so you young Señoritas will lose some partners this winter; but—*ay de mí!*—must not we all have partings? The Señora de Sancelez, for instance"—dropping the treacherous little hand whose leaping pulse betrayed its owner's interest in the name, and turning away her bright black eyes from the girl's wan white face and parched lips to an affected contemplation of a distant "mirador" standing up white and glittering against a strip of bright blue sky—"she too is in desolation. I suppose

you have heard what trouble there has been about their youngest son. He has been expelled from the *Lycée* in Paris, where he was being educated ; and Pedro had to sail for Europe at an hour's notice to investigate into the matter. They say he left on the *second* day of Carnival, and may be gone a whole year, as he wishes to see something of the world ; but the poor Señora, she misses him sadly." This was the medicine that shrewd Doña Carmelita brought to Lil, and this was the delicate way in which she administered it.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

AT LOGAN'S ESTANCIA.

"Sun in the east at mornin', sun in the west at night,
And the shadow o' this 'yer station the on'y thing moves in sight."

Bret Harte.

"'Ah dreadfull tidings which thou doest declare,'
(Quoth she) 'of all that ever hath bene known!
Full many great calamities and rare
This feeble brest endured hath, but none
Equall to this.'"—*Spenser* ('*Faerie Queene*').

A BLUE background of mountains, their irregular outlines softened and rounded by the combined influences of dust and distance. Between us and it, and stretching away for miles on either side, a wide expanse of grass country, flat, treeless, monotonous, broken only by irregular, wave-like undulations, and covered with coarse herbage, parched yellow by weeks of drought, but which yet affords pasture to huge flocks of sheep dotted everywhere about it. In the middle distance a large, low, one-storied house, flat-roofed like all others in South America, built of brick and painted white, with a

rough sort of lean-to verandah on one side, a smaller house at the back forming the servants' quarters ; and grouped all about stables, cattle-sheds, half-a-dozen mud *ranchos* for the *péons* employed on the establishment and their families, a huge sheep corral and marking-house, horses hobbled or tethered to posts and rails, while their picturesque-looking *guncho* riders dawdle about smoking cigarettes, gossiping with each other, or pretending to be doing something ; women, black, white, and Indian, screaming, laughing, and scolding each other, and the men, from the doors of their mud dwellings ; any imaginable number of children, any *un*-imaginable one of dogs ; bones, litter, noise, laughter, and oaths, all the usual concomitants, in fact, of a sheep-farm in the Banda Oriental. In the foreground, about half a mile or more from the house, a small river, so small indeed as to be hardly worthy of the name at all in the middle of the summer ; but lovely and refreshing to look at with its fringe of green waving willows and flowering shrubs, and the pleasant verdure of its banks winding along like a vivid emerald ribbon through the arid plain surrounding them. On the edge of the bank nearest to the house a tall young woman in a white dress, gazing idly down into the shallow stream beneath her, and flicking away the swarm of flies and gnats buzzing round her head with a long willow branch.

Youth is recuperative. It is spring now ; one year and eight months since the Carnival which robbed Lil of her pretty round cheeks and laughing looks, and brought at one fell swoop tragedy in its darkest and grimmest aspect into the unthinking joyousness of her gay young life ; but at nineteen the effects even of the fellest tragedy cannot endure for always ; and to-day the girl's soft pale cheeks are as delicately round as ever, the dimples have come back to the slender waxen wrist waving to and fro in the sunlight with the movement of the willow branch ; and even the blue eyes laugh out with almost their shadeless mirth of old, and on almost as little provocation. *Almost* ; not quite ! There are times even when she is with others, oftener when she is alone, when the smile fades from lips and eyes, and a shade of very sad seriousness, of wistful, yearning melancholy, creeps slowly over the flower-fair face. Her manner too is changed. It frequently alternates between a curious, almost childish timidity and passionate outspokenness ; and at times, on certain subjects which she feels very keenly, is tinged with a sudden, strange bitterness, which makes strangers wonder that so soft-looking and lovely a girl can be so hard in reality. The first delicious freshness of glad irresponsible youth is over with her, in fact, has slipped away in those long, fever-haunted weeks, while neither she nor those about her wotted

of its going ; and yet there are some who think she has gained by the change—that there is a more subtle fascination in the new, deepened expression in her wonderful eyes, the abrupt change from winning gaiety and sweetness to brusque severity and even scorn in her manner. Certainly in one thing she has improved. Those graceful curves of her lithe and slender figure are as graceful as ever, but rounder, softer, with the lovely richness of riper womanhood ; and her gracious head carries itself like her queenly namesake among the flowers on the round white column of its throat. It is little wonder that Lil has more admirers than ever. The wonder is that she has not yet selected one among them for a mate.

Yet these eighteen months have not been without their trials ; and it is one of these, a cruel and utterly unexpected one, which has sent her out here, and separated her from Liz and Louie for the first time in their three lives.

It was Carmelita Madrèra, as we have seen, who, with that gift the Madrèras possessed of knowing everything about everybody, divined what was the thing most needed by the poor girl in those dark days when she seemed to be wasting away, and who applied the healing medicine with a tact and delicacy which made it all the more efficacious ; and the effect on Lil, though not outwardly visible at first, was almost instantaneous. Relieved from the horror of her

Spanish lover's unpunished presence in the town, and the greater horror lest fresh blood should be shed between him and Captain Carnegie, sleep began at last to return to her nights, and slowly, very slowly, colour and flesh to her face and limbs. She even dared to go out when there was no longer the fear of encountering either of those faces, the mere thought of whom turned her sick and trembling; and one evening she stole out quietly as far as the English cemetery, and very humbly and shrinkingly laid a tiny bunch of white tea-rose buds and heliotrope on the foot of a new-made grave there; creeping home afterwards through the dusk like some guilty thing, and yet better—distinctly and consciously better—for the voiceless prayer for forgiveness that had accompanied the pitiful little offering—the first she had dared to formulate, even in her own heart, since the rejection of that other one by Captain James Carnegie.

After all, it was not as if she had been really *in love* with the young officer, the thought of whose grave kind eyes smote her heart with such mingled anguish, confidence, and remorse as she turned away from the turf beneath which their closed lids were hidden. Her sisters had teased her with being so. Even she herself, in her absolute, virginal ignorance of the real nature of the master passion, played at, but never really experienced, had been ready to accept the imputation without

much contradiction; but in sober truth, and though the curiously blended feeling of almost affectionate liking and trust with which she regarded him might, if responded to by him and favoured by circumstances, have grown into a love higher and more solidly founded than falls to the lot of many married couples, it was in itself, and at the time of Mr. Melville's assassination, too recent of birth and delicate of nature to merit in any sense the name bestowed on it by her sisters, or to leave behind it the impress that stronger passion would have done. His death indeed—a death so awful in its nature and suddenness—had, as was natural, lifted this tender, graceful sentiment into a higher and more tragic altitude, to which the equally natural implication that it had been brought about for *her* sake had leant additional strengthening. “Greater love than this no man hath, that he lay down his life for his friends.” He had laid down his life for *her*; to throw her a flower she craved for! Was it not infinitely pardonable that, in the first agonised realisation of the sacrifice, she herself had accepted this version of it, and had connected it with the word which, but for her own repulse, he had seemed on the brink of uttering that day at the Quinta? Even before this idea, however, had had time to take root in her heart Captain Carnegie had rudely dislodged its theme by his scornful revelation of the fact that the dead

man, so far from caring for *her*, was actually engaged to some other woman whose existence he had never even mentioned to her in the seeming frankness of his other home confidences ; and had indeed thought so little of her, and her own outpourings to him, as to discuss them with a man holding both her and her sisters in such insulting estimation as Captain Carnegie himself.

It was a mortification to the girl, being, as she was, very young and very human ; and though Liz tried good-naturedly to dispel it by observing,

“ Take James Carnegie’s sayings with a grain of salt, my dear. His friend *may* have been engaged or he may not ; but engaged men can fall in love just as well as other men ; and any one could see he was smitten with you.”

Lil made haste to dismiss that idea with instinctive repugnance as one incompatible with either the purity or honour of the young officer—the very qualities indeed which had attracted her to him. Better to have been mistaken in his feelings for her than in her opinion of him ; or rather, better to forget that there had ever been any suggestion of such feelings, and to remember him only as a man whose simple sweetness and nobility of character had raised him higher than other men in her estimation, and might (but for his

early and unlooked-for death) have made him a true and valued friend.

It was thus that Lil tried to think, putting down Lisbeth's suggestion firmly, and hating herself when, against her will, the thought of it would at times recur to her ; and (fortunately for her) death in Uruguay is a matter attended with so much less ceremony and importance than in Europe, while life, on the other hand, is so much more exciting and risky, that the very ease with which those around her seemed to forget the tragedy that had snapped the glad thread of her own girlhood, and to allow new occurrences of crime and misadventure to occupy the place of it in their thoughts and conversation, helped materially in the recovery of Lil's own health and spirits ; and she was already far progressed on the road to both when the incident occurred to which I have alluded.

One evening shortly after tea, and when they were all gathered in the sala as usual, the door opened, and "Don Pedro Sanchez" was announced !

Mr. Hardy was in the room. He had been away in Buenos Ayres for a day or two, a fact to which his daughters attributed the unwonted sociability of his joining them this evening, and of his even making one or two not unpleasant remarks before burying himself in a newspaper, the opened sheet of which so nearly concealed his small, shrunk figure

and grey head that Louie, who had been reduced by his presence to the insipid amusement of looking over photographs with a very young midshipman visitor, was just beginning to vary that diversion by a little giggling and gossip, when the unlooked-for announcement startled her into silence as suddenly as though her tongue had been paralysed in her mouth.

Truly it was as if a shell had exploded in the pretty, quiet room ; but as Mr. Hardy lowered the newspaper from before his face, Liz, who was sitting opposite to him, saw, or fancied she saw, an expression there which told her that the visit was neither unexpected nor unauthorised by him, while in the same moment she had a vision of Lil standing upright with her two hands clenched together against her breast, and a face of white, frozen horror fixed upon the doorway as though some ghastly spectre had appeared within it.

With the instinct of shielding her from observation, of preventing her from fainting, it might be, Liz rose hurriedly to her feet ; but in the same instant the door leading to the bed-rooms had opened and closed, and Lil was gone, while Mr. Hardy was holding out his hand to the guest with a cordially spoken,

“ *Como esta, amigo.* This is good of you to come and see us so soon after your arrival. And how are your father, and the señora, and señoritas ? ”

Pedro answered with the usual graceful Spanish courtesy, and then turned with a low bow and extended hand to Liz, who, in her own house, and after her father's marked friendliness, had no alternative but to take it with at least outward civility. Louie, however, had no mind for such tameness. Almost breathless at the audacity of the intrusion she had remained seated, the photograph album grasped firmly in both hands, her head stiffly erect, and her small, fair features drawn into as demoniacal a scowl as their elfin capacities permitted, when an accidental glance towards her father revealed to her the fact that he was scowling so horribly at her in return that in sheer terror she dropped the album with a crash, and the next moment found it being picked up for her in Pedro's left hand, while his right was touching the fingers she would fain have snatched from him.

This was as much as she could endure, however, and the next minute she had decamped into the balcony regardless of her father's frowns, and left poor Liz to bear the brunt of the difficulty alone. The midshipman thus suddenly deserted, stared about him for a moment in puzzled astonishment, and then finding that the two elder men were speaking Spanish, and that Miss Hardy looked too vexed and embarrassed by something to remember his presence, he took heart of grace and stepped out on to the balcony also, to find Louie giving

her right hand as thorough a dry scrub as the limits of a very small laced handkerchief would allow, and holding it out afterwards in the night air as if to remove some remaining taint.

"Miss Loo! Wh-what *is* the matter?" the boy asked, staring all the more blankly at her because of the angry face she turned upon him. Louie laughed savagely.

"*The matter?*" she said, in a sharp whisper induced by a saving remembrance of her father's face. "The matter is that we are not used to seeing murd—I mean men like that man in our sala. I wonder at his *daring* to come here, and at papa welcoming him, when he must know——"

"Know what?" asked the middy, as for the second time Louie checked herself. "Is the fellow a bad sort then? But all those natives are, aren't they? A set of brown, dandified apes!"

"No, they're not," retorted Louie, whose eyes had just become aware of a handsome Spanish boy, their opposite neighbour, watching her and her companion with jealous absorption from the balcony of his own house, "not all of them, by any means. As for *that* one, however," giving her head a backward toss in the direction of the drawing-room, and applying a freshly resentful rub to her hand at the same time, "if you only knew what he'd done you—Ah, well!

never mind! You'd better *not* know, and I should be scolded if I told you; only take my word for one thing, he's a wretch; and if he were in England he would be *hung*. There! *I* shall not go back to the sala while he is in it."

Fortunately for Louie, however, and still more for Liz (who had to entertain the individual so spoken of), that was not long. Not that Pedro Sanchez seemed to detect any coolness in his reception, or to feel any embarrassment in this his first appearance in the house which he had never entered since the Carnival of the year previous. He was as well dressed as ever, as handsome, and as gentlemanly. He asked after Lil without appearing to have seen her when he entered the room, or to be aware that she had left it to avoid him. He spoke of his voyage to Europe, of Paris and Rome, allowed himself to be worsted by his host in a friendly argument on French wines; and took his departure after a call of about twenty minutes, Mr. Hardy seeing him downstairs and not returning.

Set free at last, Liz flew off in search of Lil, and found her, as she almost expected, sobbing hysterically on her bed, and in nearly as bad a state as a year ago.

"And it is not even that!" she cried, clutching hold of Liz with two cold, shaking, little hands. "It is only ten—

ten *little* months since . . . Oh ! how dare he come back ! Isn't he afraid ? ”

“ I suppose not,” said Liz. “ The Government inquiry came to nothing, you see, and no public suspicion was ever cast on him. Indeed, besides ourselves, I doubt if there were half a dozen people who had the least idea who did it. And now that the flag-ship has been ordered home he must know he's quite safe. Still I do wonder at his venturing to come *here*. It never entered my head that he could do so, or I would have warned you that he was back.”

“ Did you know it then ? ”

“ I knew he was in Buenos Ayres ; that is, I saw his name among the list of arrivals there by the Bordeaux mail about a fortnight ago. Lil ! ”

“ Yes ? ”

“ *Father expected him !* I could see it. They must have met in Buenos Ayres.”

“ But you don't think he asked him to come here ! Oh, Liz, he couldn't possibly——”

“ Why not ? *We* never said anything to connect Sanchez with Mr. Melville's assassination, you know. In fact, at the time when you were so ill, and all (and really, Lil, if you go on in this silly way you will be as bad as ever), I was particularly

careful not to mention his name before papa at all, and to say as little as possible about the affair, because—Well, I never liked to tell you before—but the first time it was alluded to he said something very unpleasant about English naval men always getting into scrapes, and generally richly deserving what they got; and that he had sometimes half a mind to forbid them the house altogether. Yes, he did; and I thought if he were to find out that we had any special concern in this affair he might do so in reality; and what *would* have become of us! *Dios sabe!* it's dull enough as it is; and I often think that hateful Carnegie must have poisoned the minds of the flag-ship people against us, for they almost all dropped calling here afterwards. I——”

“But, Liz, Liz——Oh! never mind the flag-ship people!” cried Lil, still trembling with hysterical excitement. “Do you think then that papa has no idea?”

“No, I don't,” said Liz briefly, “but I think he pretends not to have any. He may believe it more prudent to do so. You know,” sarcastically, “how very prudent papa is, and old Sanchez is all-powerful with the Government at present.”

Lil clasped her hands over her aching eyes in an agony.

“But if that is so,” she sobbed out, “if Pedro fancies papa ignorant, or willing to appear so, he may think the same of

us, and—and come again ; and oh ! I think it would kill me to see him a second time.”

“There’s no occasion for you to do so,” said Liz, comfortably. “If he did fancy that before, our manner this evening must have convinced him very thoroughly of his mistake. Don’t fret yourself. He won’t show *here* any more. Why, good gracious !” peeping through the door into the sala, “if Louie has not got in that little Enrique Pereira from over the way, and she and the two boys are playing ‘grab’. I must go in.”

“At last !” said Louie mockingly, as her eldest sister reappeared. “I fancied you were never coming back any more ; and I didn’t think it was proper for me and Mr. Stuart to be left *tête-à-tête* all the evening ; so I beckoned Enrique across to play propriety. *Entiendes*,¹ Enrique ?”

“No, Señorita,” said the lad, with a politely questioning smile.

“Of course not,” said Loo tranquilly. “I wouldn’t have said it if you could ! Mr. Stuart, *don’t* laugh ! It’s rude, and, though you mayn’t believe me, natives really don’t like it. Well, Liz,” jumping up and whispering, “was Lil *quite* bowled over by the shock of that wretch’s appearance ? At any rate you got rid of him pretty soon, and I should think for good, eh ?”

¹ “Do you understand ?”

CHAPTER II.

MR. HARDY SHOWS HIS COLOURS.

“*Celia.* Oh! my poor Rosalind, whither wilt thou go?
 Wilt thou change fathers?

 Knowest thou not, the duke hath banished
 Me, his daughter?
 Now go we in content
 To liberty, and not to banishment.”—*As You Like It.*

BOTH Liz and Loo were out in their calculations, however. Pedro Sanchez was not to be got rid of so easily; and within a fortnight after his first visit he paid them a second; but this time Lil was on the *qui vive*, and having caught the sound of his voice speaking to the servant on the staircase, was able to make her escape from the room even before he entered it. But though Pedro's brilliant black eyes followed the tell-tale sound of the closing door ere, travelling round the company, they discovered one face missing that ought to have been there, he betrayed no sense of having noted the circumstance, but greeted the remaining Miss Hardys and their guests with his usual imperturbable grace and cordiality, and even

presented Liz with a magnificent bouquet of magnolias, pomegranate blossoms, and maidenhair fern, which she took with the coldest of thanks, and laid on the table at a little distance from her without even a second glance at it. Even this did not seem to ruffle him, however, and when he was gone, Louie, much impressed by the size and beauty of the floral offering, could not help exclaiming :

“Liz, do you think it *was* he, after all? It almost seems impossible, doesn't it? And you know they said he left on the *second* day!”

Lil, however, had no such doubt to disturb her. Never for one moment had she failed to recognise Pedro Sanchez among the little band of scarlet masks on that fatal day; and as if to rob her of any hope of mistake in the matter, he had affixed to his cap a tiny, dangling gilt button, a mere spark of a thing which probably no one else noticed; but which she knew, because it had dropped from her dress a few weeks previously, and he had picked it up and refused to return it. *She had seen the glitter of that button at the moment Melville fell!*

She took to sitting quite close to the bed-room door of an evening, and next time Pedro called was gone before even he knew she had been there. He had brought another bouquet on this occasion, and the offer of his box at the opera-house

to hear a great European singer, who had just condescended to visit Monte San Felipe in the course of a tour round the world; but though Liz could not refuse the flowers, she did so by the box; and when he was gone the Elf nearly gave way to tears.

“We shall *never* have such a chance again,” she said woefully. “Who else ever sent us opera-boxes but Pedro! After all, if he *did* do it, he must have been awfully in love with Lil; and if a man were to shoot another for love of me——” but there Liz checked her so peremptorily that even Louie had not courage to finish, and only muttered rebelliously:

“Ah! well, she can’t avoid him for ever, do what she will.”

She certainly could not. Only two days later, as the elder Miss Hardys were coming down the wide staircase of the Hotel Oriental, after paying a visit to the wife of an estanciero who was staying there, they came face to face with Pedro Sanchez, in company with another young Spaniard of their acquaintance. There was no escaping him this time. He stood exactly at the foot of the stairs; and except by turning round and rushing up them again, Lil could not have avoided the meeting, especially as he came forward at once, bowing and holding out his hand with pleased *empressement*, while expressing his hopes that “the indisposition

which had prevented her from being visible to him before” had passed over.

Lil hardly answered a word. Her lips did move, and she bent her head slightly; but that was all. To shake hands with him, to touch those slender, tawny fingers, the same that had been once reddened with Frank Melville’s blood, was a thing utterly and physically impossible to her, horribly cognisant as she felt through every fibre of her being that by refraining from publishing his guilt a year ago, and assisting to shield him by her silence, she had absolutely precluded herself from showing any sense of it at the present day. She grew deadly white, however—so white that to the young Spaniard’s eyes she looked like some fair, untinted statue; but alas! the fairness only kindled into fresh flame the passionate admiration he had always felt for her, and the emotion showed itself so plainly in his eyes and tone, that the veriest stranger could not have misunderstood it.

The recognition of the fact was too much for Lil. She had begun to tremble all over, and even before Liz could hurry her adieux to their estanciero friends and the other gentleman, she broke in on them with a hoarsely uttered:

“Lisbeth, come! We must go. We—we *can’t* stop!”—and with a slight gesture of one hand, as though to sweep something unclean or loathly from her path, and a bow

which took in the rest without seeing them, she brushed past him, and escaped into the street, her sister following.

“Well, I should *think* you have done it now!” said Liz. “He’ll never risk another snub like that, and before other people too; but—walk slower, Lil, there is no need for us to run!—do you think it was wise?”

Lil turned round, her beautiful face still blanched with passionate repulsion, her lips quivering.

“Whether it was or not, I don’t care,” she said hotly. “Do *you* think I could stand there and see him looking into my eyes, smiling! Why, I could almost *see* the knife in his hand when he held it out to me—to *me*! Liz, something must be done to prevent this from going on. If there is no other remedy, I shall write to him. I shall tell him I *know*. Perhaps for fear’s sake he will keep away from us then.”

Liz moved her head uneasily.

“I don’t know,” she said. “Don’t do anything hasty. You are so impetuous, you know; and after what has happened, one can never feel safe with a man like that. Wait and see how he will take your treatment of to-day.”

But even Liz was not prepared for the way in which he did take it.

Breakfast was usually rather a silent meal at the Hardys’: Mr. Hardy not only contributing nothing in the way of

conversation himself, but casting a damper on it in others by the mere fact of his brief, taciturn presence. On the morning after Lil's encounter with young Sanchez, however, he broke through his usual habit, and looking up from his coffee with a sudden frowning glance which took in all three alike, confounded each equally by the abrupt question :

"Pray may I ask what Mr. Pedro Sanchez has done to offend you?"

For a minute there was no answer. The trio were indeed so utterly taken aback by the unexpectedness of the query, of which their father's previous conduct had given them no warning, that they could only look at one another in silent embarrassment; and Mr. Hardy took advantage of their dismay to follow up the charge.

"Perhaps I ought to put my question differently," he said, a thin, sarcastic smile coldly apparent on his lips. "You appear to find it difficult to answer in its present form. I will ask you, then, *has* my friend Don Pedro Sanchez done or said anything ungentlemanly or offensive to you so as to require you to treat him in an offensive and unladylike manner in return? I address myself to you, Liz, first. A 'yes' or 'no' will suffice."

Liz had had time to make up her mind.

"To me, papa?" she said, in a tone of some surprise and

injury. "No, certainly not; nor am I aware of ever having treated him or any one else in an offensive and unladylike way. Does *he*——"

But Mr. Hardy had got what he wanted, and silenced her with a wave of the hand.

"And *you*?" he asked abruptly, turning his small, half-shut eyes on Lil, who, now pale and now crimson, was receiving mute entreaties for prudence from her sister.

The girl shook her head dumbly. She would not go against Liz, of whose superiority to herself in worldly wisdom she was fully conscious; but neither could she utter the word asked of her, though she knew it did not actually express the lie it conveyed. Mr. Hardy smiled.

"I am glad to hear it," he said drily. "There is no need to put the question to *you*," glancing scornfully at Loo, whose voluble lips were already agape for her answer; "you being happily too young and insignificant for any one to either take the trouble to offend or be offended by you; but I am glad to have the answer from your sisters that I expected. I don't interfere with your acquaintances in general. If you choose to insult nine-tenths of the empty-headed blue-jackets with whom you fill my house, so much the better for me perhaps; but when you do manage to secure for a friend a man of position, whose father is a valued acquaintance of my own,

and whom I myself both like and esteem, I must insist that he is treated properly ; not made much of one week, and his attentions eagerly invited and accepted, while the next he is put on one side, and treated to as much wanton insolence and hauteur as though he had committed some gross offence against you. You have just assured me that he has done nothing of the sort, a fact, however, of which I already felt certain ; had it not been so you would doubtless have felt it your duty to complain to me, your father, on the subject ; and I shall therefore beg him not to pay too much attention to the hoydenish caprices of girls who, from having been deprived too early of a mother's care, are somewhat lamentably deficient in ladylike discretion and decorum ; and shall give him my word that he will not again have to complain of similar behaviour. Mark me, all three of you, that it is not given in vain." He had risen as he spoke, his voice rising too to sudden, harsh passion. The next moment the old unpleasant scowl and smile came back, and he added with a sneer which took in each of the fair frightened faces before him : " If it is, however, I shall say nothing ; *only* your wings will be clipped, and no man visitor shall be allowed inside this house at all."

The girls sat looking at each other in dumb, petrified consternation, which even when the last sound of Mr.

Hardy's footsteps had died away did not allow them to stir or speak ; and it was fully three minutes before even Louie could collect her faculties sufficiently together to utter the one word, "*Carrambo !*" in a voice which, however, fully expressed the crushed and astounded state of her feelings. Liz turned to Lil.

"This is what I told you," she said resignedly. "You see now how imprudent you were. It was awfully clever of Pedro, though, to go to papa ; for now we must give in of course. He never says anything he doesn't mean ; and even the pleasure of snubbing Mr. Sanchez is not worth losing *all* our other friends for, and being walled up like criminal lunatics. Come, Lil" (seeing decided rebellion in her sister's flashing eyes), "it will be only an outward show after all. He can't get any real gratification from it ; for we can make it quite apparent to him all the same that our private feelings are unchanged."

"He will not be gratified by any outward show from *me*," said Lil hotly. "No, Liz, it's no use your saying anything. You and Loo can do as you please ; or as papa pleases. I will be silent. I will do nothing worse than I have done. I will not say a word to betray that man ; but no power on earth shall make me touch his hand, or treat him as a friend, even if my punishment is never to speak to any one again."

“And she means it too!” said Loo, making round eyes of consternation at her elder sister as Lil hurriedly left the room with tears of burning indignation in her own. “Well, I never thought Lil selfish before; but she is. She doesn’t think a bit of *us*; and we weren’t in love with Mr. Melville.”

“She will come round,” said Liz quietly, “especially if we say nothing about it, and are a little cool to her. Lil can’t bear being unfriends, you know. Well, Miss Louie, I suppose if Don Pedro offers us a box for Carlotta now, you’ll get **your** way.”

But Pedro did not offer his box a second time; neither did he seem in any hurry to test the young ladies’ filial obedience by calling again, and the days passed quietly by till one morning they received an invitation from the Señora de Sanchez, who from the day of her encounter with Loo had held no intercourse whatever with them, asking the three girls and their father to a large breakfast-party at another quinta of theirs in the Aguada. The invitation was addressed to Mr. Hardy, so there was no chance of concealing it from him; and as he handed it to Lisbeth he merely observed:

“You had better write this morning and accept; and I suppose you’ll be wanting some money for new gloves or

boots. It is to be a large affair, so I wish you to look decent."

"If we go," said Liz hesitatingly; "but there would be the expense of a carriage for the day as well; and really the weather is so hot at present that——"

"That you don't think I ought to mind the outlay for the sake of a day in the country, among the trees—is that what you are going to say?" Mr. Hardy put in with a dry smile. "Well, as I happen to have political reasons for going myself, I agree with you; so order the vehicle at Domenico's, and one large enough for the four of us. I believe you are all asked."

"Yes, but that was only a form, of course. We had better not all go. We should make such a large party," said Lisbeth, doing battle courageously for Lil, who, as she well knew, wild horses could not take to the festivity under discussion. Mr. Hardy's pale little eyes surveyed her searchingly from under their grey brows.

"You will do as you like about that," he said grimly. "If you think Louie too young or too *gauche*—I once heard something of her being saucy to Madame Sanchez—she had better stay at home; but you and Lil will go, and will, I trust, remember my warning of the other day. Kindly remind her of it," with which he took himself off, and Liz,

feeling very uncomfortable, sought her sister with the message.

Lil turned very pale, but she took it quietly none the less. "Then I must tell him that I will not go, and *why*," she said, speaking quite firmly, though her lips trembled a little; "don't look frightened, Liz. It is my affair, and I must bear the brunt of it, come what may. You have done all you could."

She sought her father that same evening, going down-stairs to the *escritorio*, or study, where she knew he always spent an hour or so before going out for his nightly game of billiards; but though she tried to feel courageous and to remind herself that, though cold and unloving, her father had never been positively unkind to her, her little stock of bravery had nearly oozed away before she knocked at the door; and it was a very pale, frightened-looking girl who answered his sharply spoken, "Come in!"

He looked up at her in evident surprise, and asked with a sudden, half frown:

"*You?* What is it? Does any one want me?"

"No, papa," said Lil timidly, "at least, I mean I wanted to—to speak to you; that is all."

"To speak to me? What about? I hope not to say you are going to be ill again. If you take to looking as languid

and die-away as you did all last winter, men will be afraid to ask you to marry them ; and I failed to find out then that there was anything really the matter with you."

"There is nothing the matter with me now, papa," said Lil, blushing and trying to smile, "and I am in no hurry to be married. I would much rather stay as I am."

"Would you? That's unfortunate," said her father, "for in spite of your pale face some one is, it seems, anxious to marry you ; and, as he is a very good match for you, I am not displeased to hear it."

"*Papa!*" cried Lil, her face not pale at the moment, but ghastly, her two slight hands thrust out as if to ward off some sudden horror. "*What do you mean?* Who are you speaking of? Not—not——"

"I am speaking of Don Pedro Sanchez," Mr. Hardy answered quietly, but avoiding her eyes as he did so, "who has asked my permission in what I consider a very gentlemanly and honourable manner to pay his addresses to you. I have not mentioned it to you before, because I thought it only fair that he should have the pleasure of doing so for himself, and also because his intentions had been so clearly apparent, even before that affair of his brother obliged him to leave for Europe last year, that you must have been fully prepared for the announcement long ago. As, however, he may

not improbably choose an opportunity, on Friday, for making his proposal to you in due form, I think I had better give you a hint of it beforehand, that you may not be embarrassed as to your answer by any doubt about my consent."

"I shall never ask you for it," cried Lil, stung beyond endurance by her father's tone. "What!—want to marry me—to marry me! Oh! how can he dare——"

"Is this a piece out of some drama you are acting?" her father interrupted her. "If so, I hope it is not going to be performed on Friday; for though I dare say it may be very fine, I doubt whether Don Pedro would appreciate it."

Lil's face flushed deeply.

"He will not need to do so," she said, trying hard to speak composedly. "I am not going to the Sanchez on Friday. I came here to tell you so."

"Indeed! Then I may as well tell you that you are to go, and also that it is my desire that you treat Pedro Sanchez properly when you get there. Do you hear?"

"*Properly!*" Lil repeated indignantly; then, her tone changing to almost passionate appeal: "Papa, you can't be in earnest! You don't mean that—that you *could* wish me to marry that man!"

"And why not, may I ask? Why should not 'that man,' a man of good position, good fortune, and excellent

repute, be a fit husband for a penniless slip of a girl like you?"

"Because he is not fit to touch my hand, or that of any decent girl, and he knows it," cried Lil, her lip trembling with grief and passion at her father's tone. "Papa, don't *you* too, that you talk like that?"

Mr. Hardy grew a little paler, apparently with annoyance.

"Do I not know what?" he asked icily.

"That it was Pedro Sanchez who killed Mr. Melville last Carnival: stabbed him in—in front of this very house!"

For all immediate reply Mr. Hardy jumped up, went to the door, opened it as if to see that no one was listening; then reclosing it carefully, came back to where Lil, frightened at the sound of her own words, was standing white and trembling by the table, and took her roughly by the arm.

"Are you *mad*?" he asked, in a low, grating voice; "I have always thought you a silly, hysterical, feather-brained girl; but are you stark, raving mad, that you dare to say such a thing as that, and aloud?"

"But it is true," Lil said almost in a whisper, and with her terrified eyes fixed helplessly on the threatening face so near hers.

"True! Do you know what you are saying, —— you!" Mr. Hardy very seldom swore; but her persistency seemed

to have roused him to something like fury at the present moment. "Do you mean that *you saw him*—young Sanchez!—do this thing?"

Poor Lil faltered and flinched, trying but in vain to free her soft round arm from the grip which held it.

"I—I did not exactly see him do it," she stammered; "but I recognised him in the scarlet mask; and when Mr. Melville threw me the flowers I saw him make a kind of rush as if to push him away. Mr. Melville fell, and——Oh! papa," breaking off with a shuddering sob, "you know the rest: that when they lifted him up he was *dead*—stabbed to the heart."

"And for this," said her father, still holding her firmly, and looking at her with an expression of angry dislike she had never seen on his face before; "for this, the stabbing of a rowdy young sailor by some one in a crowd, some nigger most likely whom he had offended by a little of that brutal, bullying horse-play these English blue-jackets are so fond of, you dare to accuse a gentleman of Don Pedro's standing and position with a wanton and unprovoked murder! Are you crazy, I say? Did he even know this young Melville to speak to?"

Lil hesitated again. The tears were running down her cheeks, crimsoned now with shamed remembrance and pain.

"No," she said piteously; "but—but he was angry with him—with me at least. He wrote to me about taking Mr. Melville to the Quinta Disgraciada. It was a very impertinent letter, and I took no notice of it; but—but——"

Her father interrupted her.

"*You* took this Melville to the Sanchez' Quinta! What for, pray? These are fine doings to hear of at this date! 'Impertinent' indeed! By heaven, if Sanchez was thinking of making you his wife, he did well to look after your reputation a little; for you seem to have been perilling it finely. But that's not the question in point. Did Don Pedro threaten Mr. Melville in this letter you speak of?"

"N—no," said Lil feebly. After all, it was true. He had not.

"Nor at any other time? Answer me at once, will you!"

Lil shook her head. She was crying too bitterly for words.

"He did not, eh? He never knew him, never spoke to him, never threatened him; but because he had cared enough for you to remonstrate with *you* on your fast and imprudent behaviour, and because he happened to be among the other masquers on one of the days last Carnival when this officer was stabbed by some one you did not see, and whom no one

else saw—on this absurd, baseless shadow, your insane vanity and love of romance finds an excuse for accusing an honourable, high-minded man of a brutal and foolish murder !”

Lil made no answer. Where was the use ? and Mr. Hardy let go her arm with a jerk which made her stagger.

“Pray how many people have you repeated this calumny to ?” he asked sternly. “I should like to know how far you have injured an unoffending man, and put yourself in danger of being prosecuted for libel.”

Lil looked up through her tears.

“Papa,” she said piteously, “it is no calumny ; and if you could see Captain Carnegie now he would tell you so. He was there at the time. He knew it too, and he came to me afterwards and told me . . . but—but I have never spoken of it to any one else ; nor did he either. He—he said because Mr. Melville was engaged at home he did not wish . . .” Her voice was broken with sobs wrung from her by the remembrance of that cruel interview ; but Mr. Hardy was in no mood to show mercy to her weakness.

“Captain Carnegie was, I believe, this Melville’s oldest and dearest friend,” he said drily ; “yet because he is safely in England, you ask me to believe that he not only knows who was his brother-officer’s murderer, but has deliberately concealed his knowledge from those who would bring the assassin

to justice, and left the country without confiding the secret to any one but a girl who might chitter-chatter both it, and his acquaintance with it, to half a score of her fellow-gossips before the day was out!—Oh! you *are* insane. There is no good in doubting it, or in being angry with you. Well, I have heard of these hysterical manias in girls before; but . . .”

“Papa, indeed it is no mania.”

“Silence! I tell you it is; and fortunate for you that I think so, and do not punish it as a vile and wicked calumny by sending you away from home till you repent of it.”

“I cannot repent of it,” Lil said very low, and with whitening lips.

“At least then you shall make amends for it, and in the first place by going to the Sanchez picnic on Friday, and behaving to Don Pedro as you should to a person you have so shamefully wronged. Do you hear me?” as she made no answer, save by a red spot of agitation in either cheek.

“I hear you, papa, but I—I cannot do it. It is impossible.”

“Impossible to obey your father!” he almost shouted.

“Yes—in this. Oh! papa, please don’t be so very angry. I will do anything else you like. I—I am very sorry if I ever flirted with Don Pedro; but it is true what I have said; and he . . .”

Her father interrupted her for the second time that evening by going to the door; but this time he took hold of the handle as if to open it.

“No,” he said, recovering in a moment his usual control of voice and manner, “I shall not be angry. One is not *angry* with hysterical maniacs. One only—puts them under control. Do you understand? I have seen for some time that you were out of health, and wanted change. Logan is in town at present; and tells me that his wife finds estancia life very dull with no other woman within twenty miles to speak to. Now, listen to me carefully. *I do not go to the Sanchez’ on Friday without you*, unless I have the excuse that an alteration for the worse in your health has compelled me to send you out of town for change of air and scene. If you persist in this delusion, I shall take that course as the only means possible for curing you of it, and protecting the family generally from any similar vagaries on your part. Logan leaves town on Saturday; and his wife will be too glad of any companion to need preparation for one; so you know how much time you have to make up your mind in. Leave the room now. I have nothing more to say.”

This then was how Lil came to be at the Logans’ estancia. At the moment, and in the longing for any escape from the

miseries of her position, she almost hailed the chance of deliverance offered her ; and she had no fear of not finding a welcome. As Mr. Hardy had said, Englishwomen in the interior of Uruguay are too rare and precious not to be held in high and worshipping regard, and their presence regarded as an unmixed boon. There are countries where hospitality is not a virtue, but a privilege.

CHAPTER III.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

“In listening mood she seemed to stand,
The guardian Naiad of the strand.

A foot more light, a step more true,
Ne'er from the heath-flower dashed the dew.”

Scott (‘The Lady of the Lake’).

“Sic a wife as Willie had,
I would na gie a button for her.”—*Burns.*

WE have left Lil a long time standing on the banks of the river, or *arroyo*, as it is called in these parts; but in the first place it was necessary to explain how she came there at all; and in the next the *arroyo* was by no means an unpleasant spot to linger by on a fine spring morning before the sun had had time to heat the air unpleasantly, or even to dry up the dew which still hung on the tangle of long lush weeds and grasses in shady nooks, like a heavy veil of silver tissue wrought through and through with diamond sparks.

People rise early for the most part in the “camp”, as the Argentine and Uruguayan prairies are popularly called by

their English-speaking residents ; and Lil had been up at five, and had served her host and the other men staying in the house with the hot coffee and biscuits which formed a sort of early breakfast for them, ere they started for the morning ride of inspection round the different *puestos* on the estancia before the heat of the day set in. Generally Lil had her horse saddled too, and went with them, coming back all the rosier and fresher for the early gallop : and now and then Mrs. Logan also made one of the party ; but, most frequently, fat and laziness combined to persuade that good lady with a decided preference for bed until such time as the real breakfast, a substantial meal partaken of somewhere between ten and eleven o'clock, was ready ; and to-day, Lil's horse being laid up with a sore back, she too had elected to stay at home ; and having fed Mrs. Logan's parrot and canary, cleaned out their cages, and watered the few and very dusty plants which adorned the verandah, she put on her hat, tucked a book under her arm, and rambled down to a favourite nook of hers near the *arroyo*.

It was just at the spot where the stream was narrowest and deepest, the bank on the estancia side taking a sharp inward curve for about a hundred yards, beyond which at either end it ran out into a little, thickly-wooded promontory which cut off the view in both directions beyond that area ; while

the opposite bank, which was considerably higher, and fringed with a dense thicket of willows, made a corresponding bow, round which in the wet season the narrowed stream ran as fiercely as the curved and glittering blade of a Turkish scimitar.

The pendant boughs of the willow, mingling with the thorny ones of the tala and the scented lilac blossoms of the paraiso tree, met overhead and were reflected in the dark waters below; while from every trunk and twig hung draperies of passion-flower and the big violet-hued convolvulus mingling with some nameless, scarlet-blossomed creeper, in and out of which the humming-birds kept flashing like sparks of green and ruby flame. It was a pretty, sheltered, flowery nook, albeit that the fringe of green did not stretch for more than a dozen to thirty yards inland from either bank, and that within another couple of months the stream which lent it its refreshing hue would be dried up into a mere thread, or rather into a succession of stagnant pools sending up a hot steam into the drouthy air from their bed of fetid, sun-cracked mud: albeit too, that hidden just behind the fringe of willows on the lower promontory was a ford, formed by a sudden shallowing and widening of the *arroyo*, where cattle came to drink at all hours of the day, and from whence she could even hear the rough voices of passing *tropèros*,

striving by threats and curses to urge their string of unwilling and restive packhorses through the muddy water.

But though these sounds were audible to the girl, they were just sufficiently removed by distance, and commonplace in nature, not to disturb her; and she had no more fear of annoyance or interruption in the leafy retreat she had chosen for herself, than if it had been in the centre of a gentleman's park at home; while as regards snakes, scorpions, and other venomous *bichos*, some one had made it safer for her by clearing a tolerably wide path, not only round the old willow in whose gnarled lower branches she had found a seat, but through the belt of weeds and undergrowth leading to it.

It was in this tree that she had perched herself now, and lost in the interest of the book she had brought with her (a tattered and tobacco-stained copy of the 'Woman in White,' left at the estancia by some male visitor), had forgotten how time was passing, and heard neither the screaming of a flock of small green parrots in the boughs above her, nor the discordant croaking of millions of frogs down in the river mud; nor even the splashing of water, neighing of horses, and human voices raised in various more or less objurgatory expressions, testifying to the fact that some party of men and horses was crossing the ford in the direction of the estancia. The voices died away again before long, but the splashing con-

tinued and drew nearer, till its sudden cessation and the consequent stillness caused Lil to look up with a quick, nervous start, and find herself staring straight into the face of a man who was seated on horseback in the middle of the stream, and gazing curiously through the network of willow-leaves at the girl above him.

For a moment she was really frightened. It was the first time any one had ever invaded her solitude that way, the passage up-stream being indeed very dangerous, owing to the presence of several big holes in the bed of it; and the man was so near he could have stretched out his hand to touch her by pushing away the slender branches between them; but in the act of starting up to escape, a little smile and colour came into her face, and she stood still, silent and poised like some wood-nymph on her leafy perch. In that first glance she had seen that the stranger was both an Englishman and a gentleman; and all thought of fear or nervousness went away from her on the instant.

With one of her own countrymen she *must* be safer (if anything) than alone; and perhaps he was going to the estancia, and had missed the ford, and wanted direction. It scarcely needed a second glance to tell *her* that he was a new-comer in the country.

And yet he was not attired in any unduly fashionable, or

even civilised, fashion. He was quite young, not more than four-and-twenty, and strikingly handsome ; a man little over middle height, but so well-built and “set up”, with such square shoulders, hollow back, and shapely, well-poised head, that he looked more than his real height, and never perhaps to better advantage than in his present guise of long riding-boots, and knickerbockers of heather-coloured tweed, worn over a blue linen shirt, and girt round the waist by a “gaucho” belt of untanned deerskin, embroidered Indian-wise in bright-coloured silks, and fastened by a massive buckle composed of four gold *onzas*.¹ His pouch was strapped behind him on the saddle, according to custom, and his low felt hat, pushed back upon the glossy tangle of curling auburn locks which covered his head, afforded a full view of the darkly violet eyes under their darker level brows—the transparent colouring, delicately-shaped nose, and heavy brown moustache, shading a somewhat too-pointed, clean-shaven chin, which went some way towards making up the list of Mr. Max Lorrimer’s attractions.

If Lil, in her white dress, with the sunlight on her yellow hair, and on the flicker of green leaves around her, made a fair picture in his eyes, there is no denying that she, on her part, had seldom seen one better worth gazing at in return.

¹ An *onza* is equal to three pounds four.

The two young creatures looked at each other as Adam and Eve may have done at their first meeting in Paradise, and it was the man who spoke first.

“*Dispense, señorita, si—si—yo—*” he began in the most laboriously atrocious Spanish, uttered with the freshest English accent, as he took off his hat to her, an effort of courtesy which the renewed plunging of his horse rendered somewhat difficult. Lil thought it only charitable to interrupt him.

“*I* am English too,” she said, with pleasant unconsciousness of the slur she was putting on his Spanish by the use of the adverb. “Are you alone, and did you want to ask me to direct you anywhere?”

The stranger’s surprise and delight lit up his face most agreeably.

“*English!* Are you really?” he exclaimed eagerly, and taking off his hat again with an impetuous deference which bared his curly head altogether. “What a delightful coincidence to meet a fellow-countrywoman in these wilds! And yet the first moment I caught sight of you I thought you *could* not be a native; and I began to be afraid I was trespassing on private property. Am I?”

“Certainly not,” said Lil. The young man spoke in a peculiarly pleasant voice, soft and mellow, with a refined

accent all the more refreshing to her from its having grown somewhat unfamiliar during the last eight months. She answered him without the slightest embarrassment or affectation of shyness. "This bank is the limit of Mr. Logan's land, but the *arroyo* is neutral property. If you have come up from the ford, however, you were fortunate in getting so far without an accident. They say the bed of the stream is full of deep holes hereabouts."

"By Jove, then, I am lucky to have escaped them! My friend might have warned me, as it is his horse I am riding, and a broken leg for it would have been his loss. If you'll allow me, and I shall not splash you, I'll save any further risk by landing."

He did it almost as he spoke, though it was not an easy performance, the bank being high, and the water up to his stirrup-irons, while the horse was tired enough to be unwilling for the leap; but his master *pro tem* was evidently at home in the saddle and accustomed to make the beast under him obey. There was a small streak of blood mingling with the water on the animal's side, as after a momentary plunge and struggle he was landed, dripping and foam-flecked, on the bank at Lil's side; but the rider's voice was as gracefully easy and polite as ever, as he expressed a hope that no drops had gone over her, and added:

“You mentioned Mr. Logan’s name. I am on my way with a friend of mine to visit him at his estancia. Indeed I only left my party at the ford because I thought a twenty mile ride had made me too unpresentable to show at a gentleman’s house without getting rid of some of the dust first, as this shady stream gave me a promise of doing. I little thought, however, that I was rushing into the presence of the tutelary nymph of the spot; and I do hope you will forgive my intrusion.” Then, as by a sudden thought, as he dismounted and came to her side leading his horse by the bridle: “By the way, I had forgotten—how very stupid of me! Some one said there was a *Mrs.* Logan. Of course you——”

“No,” said Lil, smiling a little, “I am *not* she. I am only a visitor at the estancia; but as it is quite near, and I am going back there now, I can take you with me. You must be ravenously hungry if you have come such a distance, and I am sure Mrs. Logan will excuse your dustiness. We are used to that commodity here.”

“Are you? You are very kind to me; but I ought to tell you my name. It is Max Lorrimer, at your service, at present a guest of a certain Mr. Nicholls of the Estancia Santa Isabella. Probably you know him.”

“I don’t think so, but I dare say he is a friend of Mr.

Logan's. I have not been here long enough to know all of them as yet."

"Then like me you are only a recent arrival in this country?"

"Oh no, I was born in it, and my home is in Monte San Felipe."

"Nonsense! Oh! I beg your pardon; but is it *really*? I could not have believed it."

"Why not?" and Lil opened her eyes, turning a little round from the house, which they were now quite near, to look up at her companion. He was still walking beside her, and drew nearer as he answered in a low voice and with head bent towards hers:

"Because even in my wildest imaginings I could never have believed so rough a land *could* bear so fair and exquisite a flower. Please may I know now by what name I ought to call it?"

He got no answer for a moment. Two or three half-Indian boys had made a rush forward to take his horse, and lead it off to where sundry others were tethered in front of the house; while one of the lads volunteered the information that the *patron*¹ and the rest of the *gente*² were in the verandah at the side of the building.

¹ Master.

² People.

“Then take this gentleman there,” said Lil shortly. A deep colour had come into her face, but rather that of displeasure than of confusion, and she held her head suddenly erect. It did not need any extraordinary quickness on Max Lorrimer’s part to see that he had made a mistake, and that her previous frank manner conveyed no invitation towards familiarity.

“I *beg* your pardon,” he said eagerly, and trying to stop her as they entered the *saguan*, or arched entry to the house, and she made a slight motion as if to leave him. “I’m afraid you think me impertinent; but I assure you I only spoke on the impulse of the moment; and if you can imagine the delightful surprise of meeting an English girl at all in such an unlooked-for manner—” He got no further, for Lil had partly opened a door through which floated a buzz of voices, and among them one which exclaimed in very audible tones:

“Oh, it was Lorrimer’s bet. He thinks himself no end of a lady-killer, and has backed himself to make a conquest of the pretty Miss Hardy within half-an-hour of meeting her. For the sake of my pocket, Mrs. Logan, *I* hope she’ll—”

Max Lorrimer turned round with a face of agony; but Lil had disappeared; and he had nothing for it but to follow the Indian boy into the room within.

It was half-an-hour later before Miss Hardy made her

appearance there, and stood for a moment flushed and hesitating as she surveyed the group of people assembled in the verandah outside. Foremost among them was John Logan, her host, a giant of a man, with a long, flat red face, a bald head, and shaggy grizzled beard, falling half-way across the front of his shabby frieze coat and flannel shirt, his legs encased in long riding-boots, which were stretched out before him as he reclined almost at full length in an American cane chair; while facing him, and seated on an inverted hamper, was another man, somewhat past middle age, lean in figure, with what little hair he had growing in small, damp tufts about his head; light, watery eyes, a ragged moustache, no chin to speak of, and a nose whose abnormal size and vividness of colour testified to his devotion to the vine-wreathed god: a devotion which received further testimony from a certain trembling of his head and of the thin, sinewy hands, which were left more exposed to view than elegance required by the too tight and too short sleeves of the old alpaca coat, shrunk in repeated washings, which adorned his person. This gentleman, who had exchanged his riding-boots for a pair of venerable carpet slippers, and who rejoiced in the legal cognomen of Theophilus Meggan and the familiar nickname of "Meggy", had arrived at the estancia one day with a note of introduction from another estanciero, setting forth that Mr.

Meggan had come out to South America to try sheep-farming, and was looking about him a little before buying sheep, or taking a partnership anywhere. Logan, who was unmarried at the time, had hospitably invited him to spend a few weeks at the estancia, and when these were over by some months Mr. Meggan had prolonged the stay on his own invitation. He was "looking about him"; and as it was understood that he had already tried Australia and failed there, it doubtless behoved him to be more careful in his present adventure. That was eleven years and six months ago now, and Mr. Meggan was still at Casa Blanca, and still, it is to be presumed, "looking about". He at any rate always spoke of himself as a kind of passing bird "staying with Jack Logan for a time"; but as what little money he had ever possessed had gone long since in drink, and as South American hospitality was (in those days at any rate) incapable of turning a dog from the door that had once claimed shelter there, it is to be supposed that the "time" alluded to was so far indefinite as to be only limited by the term of his own natural existence. On the other hand, it must be said for him that he helped Logan about the estancia, let Mrs. Logan bully him, played a fair hand at *écarté*, and a bad one at whist, and so worked out his keep at any rate.

Next to him, and busily engaged in stuffing a handful of

tobacco into a huge pipe, was an unmistakable Scotchman, red-bearded and sandy-haired, about forty, and wearing the appearance of having been recently "spruced up"; though his long riding-boots, stretched out before him as he leant back luxuriously in a chintz-covered arm-chair minus two castors, were still white with the dust of the road, which it would take more than one brushing to remove. He was talking to his host across Mrs. Logan, who, seated baby-wise on a hassock at his side, with her elbows on her knees, and her fat little chin propped on two fat little fists, was giving all *her* attention to Max Lorrimer, and laughing quite as merrily, and a little more loudly, than that young man himself at something which had just been said.

Mrs. Logan was a very fat little woman altogether, almost as small and round as a good-sized ball; and when Logan fell in love with her in the stationer's shop in Birmingham, of which her father was the proprietor, and having married her brought her out to South America, she was under twenty-five, and one of those doll-like, babyish little things who might easily be taken for half as young again. That was ten years ago, and she was now betwixt thirty and forty, and looked older; but having lived at the estancia ever since, the one cynosure of admiration for all the men who came or went by there, and without a single female friend to mark

the unkindly passage of time by pointing out to her the crows' feet at the corners of her bright black eyes, and the sparse hairs in her bright black ringlets, she had continued doll-like and babyish to the present day, and with all the infantile graces and petulances proper to that impersonation.

Perhaps no other *rôle* would have suited her equally well. She had no mind, and little education. She had never had a child to awaken her maternal instincts, and her husband was too good-natured and easy-going to stir her unselfish ones; while she lacked the spur of any rival household in the neighbourhood to rouse her to anything like strict attention to her house or person. South American estancieros are a rough-living, "*laissez-aller*" race in general, easily satisfied with anything they can get in the way of food or home comforts, and going without as easily whatever is unattainable; and Mrs. Logan, finding this out early in the day, and being naturally lazy to the bone, had allowed her domestic arrangements to sink down to the lowest level compatible with the presence of a white mistress at all.

What man in those wild parts would have been unchivalrous enough to comment unflatteringly on anything in a household graced by the rare presence of one of his own countrywomen; or to hint that there were better-managed estancias even within a day's ride: houses where the mis-

tresses did not dispense with stays and darning-cotton, wear their slippers down at heel, drink strong brandy-and-water, and lie in bed till mid-day, leaving their husbands to come in, after a hard morning's work, to an ill-cooked meal and a wife in curl-papers? Mrs. Logan's husband made no remonstrance, however. A big, slow, heavy gentleman, with clumsy wits and kind heart, he had begun by worshipping the rosy-faced, childish thing whom he had first wooed at the paternal stationer's; and would have thought it cruel in the extreme to find fault with her ways and management abroad, even if he had not become too used to the rough bachelor habits of camp life to notice any shortcomings in them.

So Mrs. Logan had her own way entirely—dawdled, slept, and fanned herself, scolded her husband and her servants, fretted incessantly for the society she hadn't got, and had never known, and flirted or fumed with that she had: getting fatter and redder every day; and more convinced that she was the most unselfish martyr to ill-usage and injustice that the world had ever produced.

Who but a brute could ever have had the heart to tear her away from the shining delights of Birmingham, from shops and chapel, from cheap theatres and smart bonnets, from small dances and smaller female gossip; and bury her alive in the middle of a howling desert without a soul to speak to or

sympathise with her for the rest of her natural days? And who but a man as falsely brutal as Logan could by his misleading representations of this Gehenna of despair have inveighed a guileless young girl and her unsuspecting parents into consenting to such a sacrifice? This was the burden of Mrs. Logan's complaints, repeated *ad nauseam* to the culprit himself, and any one who would listen to them, for the last ten years; and *yet* Logan had never once lifted his hand to her, or given her a harder word than, "D—— it all, Carrie girl! don't be a fool!" when goaded to the worst pitch of aggravation.

There be men who have the patience of elephants; and the peevishness of a fat woman is often more intolerable than the passion of a thin one; but Jack Logan had always two consolations to fall back upon: the first, that if Carrie was fractious over things now, she was nothing to what she had been in the earlier days when the first pangs of disillusionment were still keen within her; and secondly, that if she nagged him, who was her own lawful bondsman and property, she nagged plenty of others also who were neither.

With regard to this, indeed, there had once been a scandalous story whispered cautiously about over the social glass in distant estancias (let it never be surmised that there is no such thing as a male gossip!), that Mrs. Logan's disgust for

the monotony of Casa Blanca had reached such a pitch some three years or so after her first installation there, and while her waist was still of moderate size, and her cheeks less like peonies than roses, as to lead her to do more than waste her time in idly reviling her miseries: in other words, to turn her back upon them altogether; and this (which was the unfortunate part of the matter) not in her husband's company, but in that of a male visitor who happened to be staying at the estancia while Logan was away on business in Monte San Felipe. The pair departed on horseback, the only mode of travelling in those parts, but unfortunately (or fortunately as the case might be) it was in the season of the equinoxes; and long before they reached the first halting-place a terrific storm of wind and rain broke over them, and soaked Mrs. Logan through, owing to the fact (then first discovered) that her companion had forgotten to bring her macintosh with him: a misfortune which rose into tragedy when, while too much occupied in bewailing her soaked condition to look where she was going, she let her horse put his foot into a *biscacho* hole and upset her over his head! Fortunately the ground was soft, and she was not hurt; but the steed was lamed; and to be drenched with rain, covered with mud from head to foot, and obliged to go at a jog-hobble, all through the reprehensible carelessness of another person,

was too much for Mrs. Logan's nerves and temper. "Even *Logan* would never have treated her so! *Logan* never let her put her nose outside the door when a storm was threatening. *Logan* would as soon have forgotten to bring her cloak—twenty cloaks if she had wanted them—or have *led* her into a hole on purpose to break her neck, as he would have dreamt of flying." To put it briefly, indeed, the lady did so weep and scold and "go on" at the luckless *Lothario*, made for the nonce responsible for her woes, that, not having *Logan's* patience, and waking suddenly to the perception that there might be two sides to every question, and that his late host was, perhaps, after all, a person more to be pitied than envied, that gentleman did then and there decide on taking a base advantage of a low hill they were then approaching, and, making a wide circuit round it, did (thanks to Mrs. *Logan's* ignorance of the country) set their horses' faces homeward again without her being aware of the fact. Nor did she find it out till they were actually within sight of the estancia, when, in answer to her exclamation of thankfulness at the prospect of some sheltering roof, he curtly informed her that she might avail herself of this one without the smallest scruple, seeing that it was her own; and that having brought her safely back to it, he should take the liberty of recommending her to remain there in future: feeling sure

that she would hardly find a more suitable one, or an individual better able than its present owner to suit himself to her, on this side of the Atlantic.

The story goes that Mrs. Logan took to her bed at once, overwhelmed with shame and anger; and there Logan, returning unexpectedly the next day, found her, laid up with a cold and ague, but extending so unusually warm a welcome to him that the good fellow was quite touched; and rejoiced mightily that the new Paris bonnet he had brought her from Monte San Felipe strapped on the back of his saddle was the smartest and most expensive to be procured in that city. The male visitor had left before then; but as Mrs. Logan frankly and piteously explained her illness as being due to his selfishness in omitting to bring her macintosh on the occasion of their going out for a ride together, &c., &c.—her husband, knowing the vivacity of his Carrie's expressions on such occasions, was not surprised at his guest's departure; nor, as I need hardly assure my reader, did any faintest hint or whisper of the ridiculous story I have just recorded ever reach his ears from that day to this. Nay, I am bound to own, that there are some who think that the whole tale was made up afterwards from the trifling circumstance that on the next occasion of Logan's meeting with the gentleman alluded to, that individual showed a decided inclination to

avoid his late host : an unsocial trait, however, which was frustrated by the burly giant himself, who, marching straight up to him, taxed him good-naturedly, though with a certain severity as well, with "not having taken proper care of Carrie, and let her in for a bad cold, during his absence *that time*," to which the culprit made no reply at all, but looked remarkably silly ; while one or two other men who were present "smole" grimly (as the great Artemus hath it) on each other before proposing the timely diversion of a B. and S. all round.

For my part, and considering all the alleged facts of the case, I must say I don't believe one word in ten of them. At any rate, be they true or false, they belonged at this time to such a remote period as to deserve to have passed into oblivion ; and Lil certainly had never heard of them.

At the present moment Mrs. Logan's bright eyes, round and black as glass beads in a red pincushion, were sparkling with enjoyment as she exclaimed, looking up into Mr. Lorimer's face :

"But what a dreadfully bold young man you must be ! I don't believe it."

"Believe what?" said Lorimer lightly. "That I am bold ! Please don't, for I assure you the reverse is, and always has been, the case."

“Well, but you must have said or done something to frighten Miss Hardy, or she wouldn’t have run away from you.”

“She didn’t. It was she who frightened *me*, and made me run away. Indeed, as you see, I ran so fast I got here first.”

“To be protected by me,” laughed Mrs. Logan, giving a sharp tug to the front of the gay silk dress which she had donned on being informed that a party of visitors were riding up to the estancia; and which, thanks to her infantile position, was giving rather prominently to view a large hole in the heel of a not over clean stocking. She had been happily unconscious of the state of her foot gear till now, and had supposed that Mr. Lorimer’s involuntarily downward glance betokened admiration for the still pretty foot which she thereupon thrust more coquettishly forward. Later discoveries turned her rather hot and cross, but she made a brave effort to conceal her mortification, and went on trippingly :

“Upon my word, you don’t deserve it, and I’ve a good mind to send you away again. Fancy owning that you have come to a lady’s house not to see her, but another young woman who happens to be staying with her ! Why, I don’t believe even Meggy there would be so rude.”

“ ‘*Even Meggy*’ ! ” grunted that individual, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and emitting a cloud of blue smoke with the words. “ But that’s always the way. Whenever shots are flying, Meggy’s sure to come in for a pellet. I don’t believe I ever said anything rude to you in my life, Mrs. Logan.”

“ And I’m sure I didn’t,” said Max ; “ Nicholson here has made an absurd statement about me, which is just his chaff of course, and which I considered too far beneath contempt for refutation ; but——”

“ Lorimer, you’re making matters worse,” put in the Scotchman with a sarcastic grin which widened a naturally wide, thin-lipped mouth so suddenly that it almost seemed as though a slice had been neatly cut through his face from ear to ear. “ Ye might as well say Miss Hardy herself is beneath contempt.”

“ And *I* don’t know that that would be worse,” said Mrs. Logan sharply. “ Lil Hardy’s my dearest friend, and I love her dearly, so I wouldn’t advise any one to make light of her ; but I think it was me that was being treated with contempt before ; and I’m ‘ present company ’, while she isn’t——”

“ Good morning, Lil, my dear,” said Logan, getting up suddenly from his long chair, and holding out a huge red hand to some one in the background. “ You’ve just come in

good time. We were wondering what had become of you, and these good folks are beginning to make as free with your name as—well, hang it all! as they do with the Almighty's."

The other men had all risen also, looking a little awkward and embarrassed, while Max hurriedly flung his cigar from him as far as it would go, accompanying the action with an ejaculation fortunately too well smothered to shock propriety.

Lil was standing at one of the glass-doors leading into the *comedor*,¹ tall and upright as a garden lily in her pure white dress, and with a whole world of fine contempt written in every line and curve of her exquisite face.

¹ Dining-room.





